

CHOICE

Laundry love

Cold weather
washing tips

CHEMIST DISCOUNTS

Not so special?

243 products TESTED

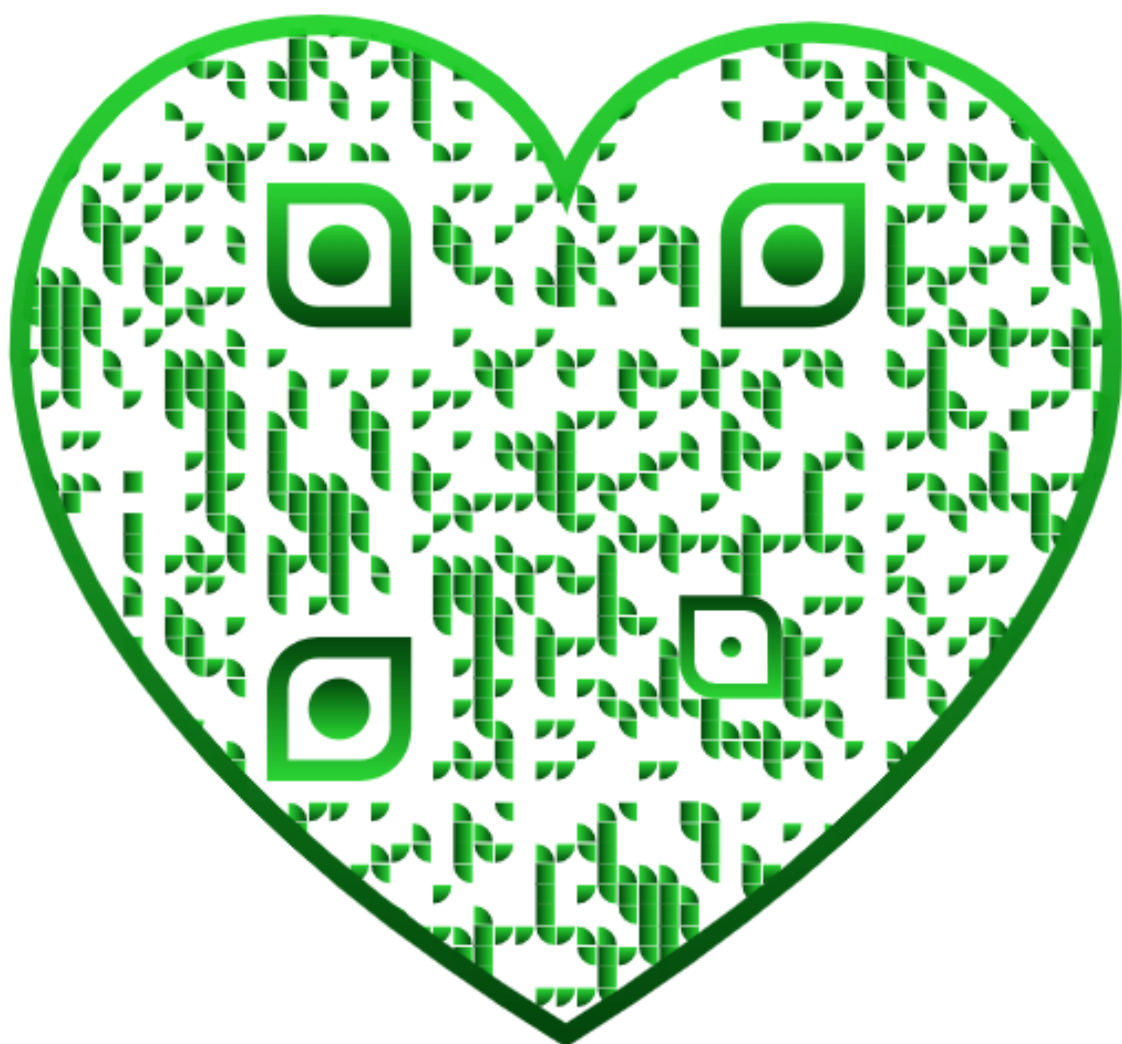
Slow cookers
Food processors
Electric blankets
Heated throws
Dehumidifiers
Headphones
Leaf blowers
Electric bikes
& more



Warm wishes

Best buys to take the chill out of winter

Plus Bank branch closures and home & contents insurance



Chill seeker

Winter brings out the weirdness in me

don't know if you've been outside recently, but it's – technical term here – bloody freezing out there. I can't handle it.

As a Scottish person living in Australia, this often confuses people. It's become something of a running joke among my friends. Despite being born and raised in a hellscape of sub-zero temperatures and endless rain, I'm the first to get wrapped up at the barest hint of cold weather.

I wrote about this exact same topic in the *CHOICE* winter issue last year, but in 2025 I'm doing something pretty extreme in response. Long story short, I'm eating a spoonful of concrete and trying to harden up.

In order to regain my long lost ability to endure the cold, I've started going into my unheated swimming pool first thing in the morning, as soon as I wake up.

It's been quite the journey.

At first – circa January/February – it was a fun little thing to do, to wake myself up. The water wasn't that cold, it just felt nice.

In April/May things started getting a bit more... real. The pool was still sitting at around 16–17°C; cold, but not completely unbearable. But now that we're firmly in the winter months, my

fun little wake-me-up has become a millstone of epic proportions.

A quick Google search tells me that the optimum ice bath temperature should be somewhere between 10 and 15°C. If that's true, my swimming pool is currently one gigantic ice bath.

Getting in is a psychological battle. My entrance into the pool is very ritualistic. I don't just jump in, although that would probably be easier. I ease myself in gently. I go in one step, then another, then I do a pathetic little "baby bomb" for the final step. Then I frantically pant and make strange noises for a minute or two, before emerging reborn – shrivelled and shivering – ready to face whatever challenges the day brings.

I've done silly little challenges like this before. I sort of enjoy having a weird little task to overcome – that's just a quirk of my personality. I'm not sure this is the most productive thing to do first thing in the morning, but I've never once regretted jumping in. Yet...

But when it comes to getting my body temperature back up to a tolerable level, I have a secret weapon in my arsenal: a heated



throw. Since coming to *CHOICE*, everyone on the editorial team has been bombarding me with tales of their beloved heated throws, so I've succumbed to the pressure and bought in.

After I emerge, shivering from the pool, sitting down to work draped in a heated throw helps me thaw my ice-cold bones. If you're interested in doing the same, read our new review of them on page 51.

Considering my regular dips into my icy swimming pool of pain, this purchase has certainly been a wise investment for me. Wish me luck for the rest of winter!

Mark Serrels

CHOICE Editorial Director

Email: mserrels@choice.com.au

CHOICE

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the best goods and services, and avoid the worst. Wherever possible, we pay full price for the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising or freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by membership. Membership includes access to services such as CHOICE Help and the Voice Your Choice research program. Our product ratings are

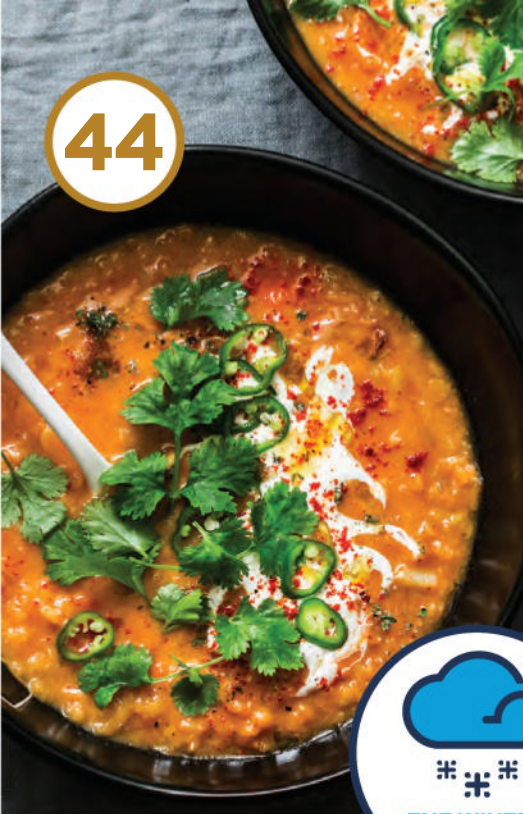
based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. We also research a wide range of consumer services, reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate their quality and claims.

BECOME A MEMBER To review the full range of membership options and benefits go to choice.com.au/signup.

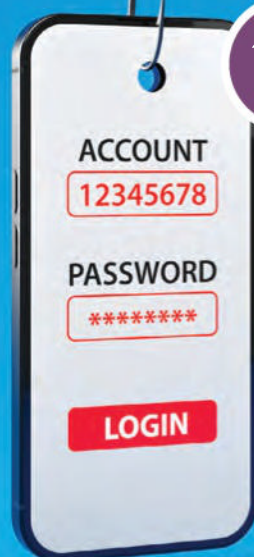
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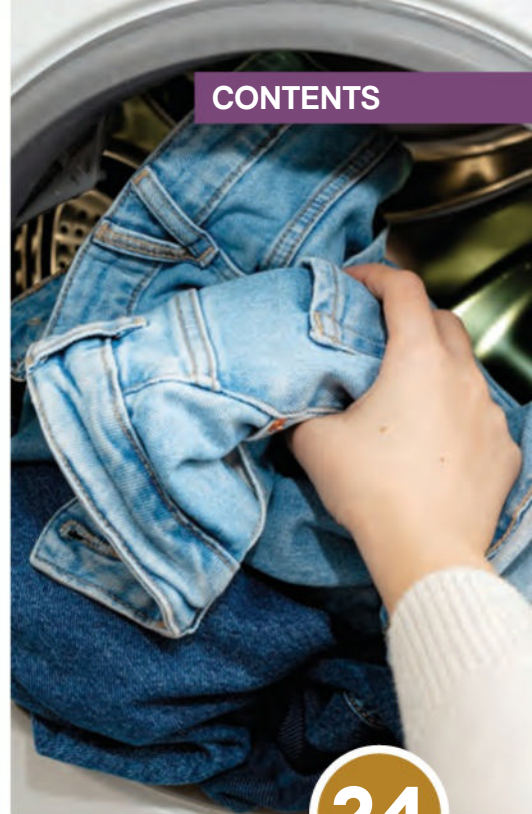
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COZY
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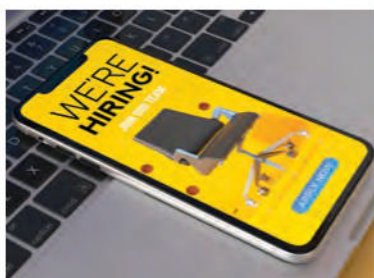


CHOICE magazine provides a selection of our top product reviews. We can't always include all the models we've tested, but you'll always find the products that scored the best. To view complete results for all our tests, go to choice.com.au, or call Customer Service on 1800 069 552 to add full online access to your membership package.

The latest consumer news in brief
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Supermarkets trade barbs in new price war

Australia's major supermarkets have been engaged in something akin to a price war in the last few months. In May, Woolworths dropped prices on almost 400 products, including chicken schnitzels, frozen berries and soft drinks.

The supermarket claimed the items were cheaper by an average of 10% and that the new prices would stay in place until at least 2026. Within days, Coles was trumpeting its own discounts on over 600 items.

Aldi shrugged off any pressure these moves put on its claims of always having lower prices, stating in a press release that it "wouldn't be beaten on the cost of [a] weekly shop". The retailer also hit out at the "flash sales" and "temporary discounts" of its rivals.

CHOICE has consistently found Aldi to be the cheapest supermarket in Australia in our quarterly surveys comparing the cost of a basket of goods at retailers around the country. Our latest survey released in June was conducted before many of the announced price drops came into effect, but we'll see if all the movement and noise about dropping prices has translated into real savings in our September update.

LIAM KENNEDY

Victoria proposes new rules to cut power bills

The Essential Services Commission in Victoria is proposing new rules that would force energy retailers to move customers in financial hardship and those who have been with the same retailer for over four years onto cheaper plans. The rules would save the average consumer around \$225 on electricity and \$182 on gas each year. The proposed changes to the Energy Retail Code of Practice are designed to help combat the so-called 'loyalty tax' and also prohibit retailers from disconnecting customers for debts under \$500 (up from \$300 currently).

Commission chairperson Gerard Brody says there are barriers that stop people shopping around the complex energy market, something these changes hope to reduce. "If an energy retailer is supporting someone in financial hardship, moving them onto the cheapest plan is a simple, considerate step they can take to help the customer. It's contradictory to be helping someone in hardship while also charging them unnecessarily high rates," he says.

JARNI BLAKKARLY



CHOICE magazine: Now with compostable wrap

We're pleased to let you know that starting this issue, your *CHOICE* magazine will be sent in a certified home-compostable wrap. Until now, the magazine was wrapped in plastic made from post-consumer recycled materials – a step in the right direction, but one we've been keen to improve upon since the REDcycle soft plastic recycling scheme ended. This new wrap is part of our ongoing commitment to reducing environmental impact. It means less soft plastic going to landfill, and reflects what many of you have asked for over the years.

HOW TO DISPOSE OF THE WRAP

Shred or cut the plastic wrap into smaller pieces and place in your home compost or FOGO bin (FOGO, which stands for food organics and garden organics, is the free home composting program run by many local councils around Australia). This wrap is not suitable for curbside recycling.



CHOICE 'super complaint' on sneaky energy bill tactics

At a time when we're all looking for ways to save, energy companies are making it harder and harder to know what you're paying and why.

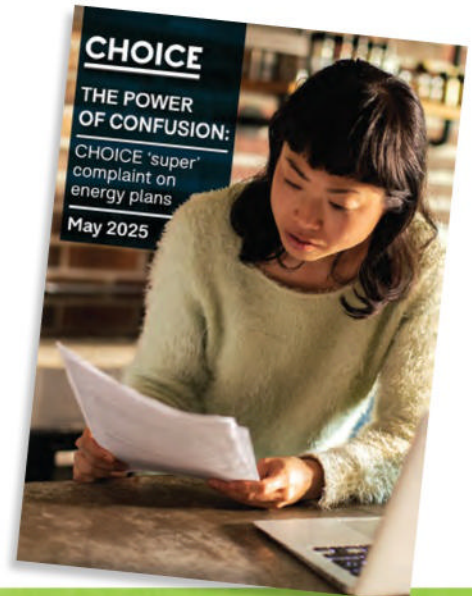
That's why in May, CHOICE used our first designated 'super complaint' to the ACCC to call on the consumer watchdog to investigate whether energy retailers have broken the law by using potentially misleading or deceptive tactics to describe and promote their energy plans.

The complaint was informed by our analysis of almost 400 energy bills, submitted by CHOICE members and supporters, which revealed that many retailers were reusing identical names

for energy plans despite offering them at different prices. Out of all the bills we collected, 64 informed consumers they could save money by switching to a plan with the same name as their existing plan. Many consumers reading this information were led to believe they were already on the best plan because the names were identical, potentially missing out on savings as a result.

To put an end to these dodgy and confusing energy pricing tactics that make it nearly impossible to choose the cheapest energy plan, we're calling on the ACCC to enforce the law with strong court action.

JORDAN CORNELIUS



EnergyAustralia retires its carbon offset program

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) reported in 2023 that 57% of the businesses it surveyed were making environmental claims that were either unclear, inaccurate, or simply not true. It seems fair to say that a repeat of this exercise today would yield similar results.

In May, EnergyAustralia agreed to settle a legal case brought by Parents for Climate, who alleged the company's Go Neutral carbon offset product was a form of greenwashing, since the energy the retailer was selling was still being generated by fossil fuels.

EnergyAustralia admitted that it "could have been made clearer to customers" that carbon offsets do not prevent or undo the damage caused by fossil fuels. The company put an end to its Go Neutral program, which had been running since 2016, and says it's now focusing on reducing emissions.

"We welcome the acknowledgement from EnergyAustralia," says Parents for Climate CEO Nic Seton. "Not only does this acknowledgement send a powerful message that the era of unchecked greenwashing is over, but it's incredibly reassuring to see the commitment from one of the largest energy retailers in the country to want to do better for their customers and the climate."

ANDY KOLLMORGEN





Oil trial a ‘major step forward’ in soft plastic recycling

Refining company Viva Energy has announced it has successfully processed more than 9.5 tonnes of oil made from plastic waste in what it says is a “major step forward” in efforts to recycle Australia’s glut of the material. Experts say turning polymers into oil and then refining it for use in new plastic products or as an energy source could be the most effective way to reuse Australia’s stockpiled soft plastics.

Viva has processed smaller amounts of plastic pyrolysis oil at its Geelong refinery in the past, but says this latest exercise was in part designed to inform the best way to design plastics so they can be recycled using this process.

Viva’s trial comes as supermarkets and councils launch their own initiatives to collect soft plastics for recycling following the collapse of REDcycle in 2022. Recyclers are still working through thousands of tonnes of soft plastics left over from REDcycle, in addition to the materials now being collected. Most soft plastics are currently being repurposed as concrete or asphalt additives or in new plastic items. Viva is one of at least two Australian recyclers experimenting with the oil method.

LIAM KENNEDY



IMAGES: GETTY

Why CHOICE has stopped testing gas appliances

For 65 years, CHOICE has tested household products to help Australians make informed decisions and protect people from unsafe products. Throughout this period, we’ve started and stopped testing products for a range of reasons, however, we are always guided by our vision: fair, safe and just markets that meet the needs of Australian consumers.

This vision prompted our decision to stop testing gas appliances, with the exception of barbecues.

Australia is in the midst of an energy transition and many households are making the shift from gas to electric – not only for environmental reasons, but because modern electric appliances are safer, more efficient and cheaper to run over time.

Modelling by Energy Consumers Australia estimates that going all-electric could cut the average household’s energy bills by \$2250. Gas cooktops have also been linked to health risks.

We think this is reason enough for many consumers to choose electric over gas appliances. The fact that gas is a fossil fuel and electric appliances also support a cleaner energy future is an added bonus.

CHOICE will continue to provide trusted advice and information about gas appliances, recognising that for some consumers they may still be the best – or only – choice, but we won’t invest our limited resources to lab-test gas appliances.

ROSIE THOMAS and MATTHEW STEEN





Telco fined again for exposing consumers to scams

Telco Circles.Life has been fined over \$400,000 for not carrying out proper ID checks and allowing scammers to transfer stolen phone numbers to its service. The transfers gave criminals control of the numbers, allowing them to steal at least \$45,000 from victims. It's the second time in three years that Circles has broken rules designed to protect consumers from phone porting scams. In this latest case,

the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) found the telco had failed to comply with customer identity verification rules 26 times between January and February last year.

Since 2020, telcos have been required to verify the identity of anyone asking for their phone number to be moved to a new service. These rules are designed to combat phone porting scams,

where criminals impersonate a victim and request for the victim's number to be moved to the new telco provider. This often results in messages and calls to the victim's phone being diverted to a device the scammer controls, giving them access to the victim's bank accounts and other sensitive services.

LIAM KENNEDY

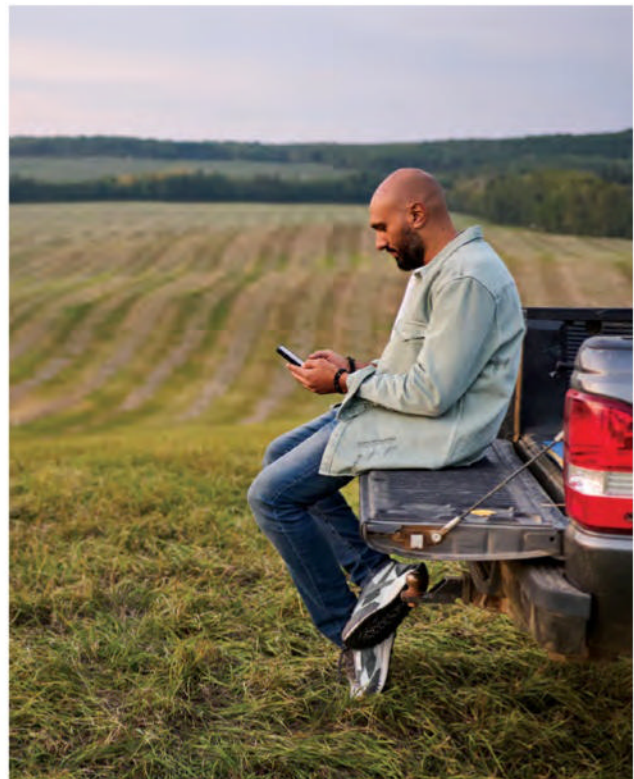


New rural phone services to fill coverage gaps

Australia's major telcos are working on ways to connect out-of-range mobiles directly with satellites to bring services to more people in rural and remote areas. In May, Telstra became the first to allow customers to send and receive text messages when they're out of reach of its existing tower-based mobile network. Telstra Satellite Messaging (TSM) uses Starlink satellites to beam service down to eligible smartphones being used outside of Telstra's cellular network and provide them with access to SMS, as long as the user has a clear view of the sky. Traditionally, people have needed special phones or equipment to consistently receive services via satellite.

Direct-to-handset (DTH) services like TSM have been championed as a way to fill in coverage gaps in Australia's tower networks, especially after many people reported losing service after the shutdown of 3G last year. Vodafone and TPG have also been experimenting with DTH services for SMS. But the two have also accused Telstra of misleading consumers by claiming its existing cellular network covers three million square kilometres and 99.7% of Australians. Telstra says it stands by these claims.

LIAM KENNEDY



Anti-scam centre cracks down on fake job ads

The National Anti-Scam Centre says they have removed more than 29,000 social media accounts and 1850 fake job advertisements in a crackdown on employment scams targeting vulnerable people. Between September 2024 and March 2025, the effort, which involved government, law enforcement agencies and the private sector, specifically targeted job scams, which had increased by 151% in the previous year. Australians lost \$13.7 million to job scams in 2024.

“Job scams have been one of the fastest growing scam types, as scammers are increasingly preying on

people seeking relief from cost-of-living pressures,” says ACCC deputy chair Catriona Lowe. “These scams disproportionately impact people on low incomes, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, international students, non-resident visa holders, people with caring responsibilities, and others with limited employment options.” The National Anti-Scam Centre says they worked closely with Meta (which owns Facebook and Instagram), as well as targeting cryptocurrency wallets and exchanges.

JARNI BLAKKARLY



South Australian consumers warned about dodgy tradespeople

Rogue tradespeople have been running amok in South Australia in recent months, to the extent that the state government has launched a new campaign to warn potential victims of excessive charges for unnecessary work. SA's Consumer and Business Services agency is investigating a significant number of these cases for potential breaches of Australian Consumer Law. Meanwhile, consumers are warned to watch for red flags, especially tradespeople hawking their services door-to-door or offering suspiciously cheap callout fees. There have

been many reports in SA in recent years of door-to-door traders taking their pay upfront, doing shoddy work, then vanishing without a trace.

The government recommends consumers check for independent online reviews about tradespeople and ask for recommendations from people they know and trust. Consumers should also know that every builder and tradesperson in South Australia is required to display their licence number on any advertising materials and their business card.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN





Superannuation fund ads harming new job starters

Did you know that superannuation funds are allowed to serve you advertising when you start a new job? This can result in people signing up for multiple – potentially low-value – super accounts, each with its own set of fees and insurance premiums.

Later this year, the laws around super funds advertising to people starting a new job are set to change. But the government's draft legislation introduced in March stops short of banning advertising altogether.

"Treasury's own modelling showed that allowing super funds to advertise on employee onboarding software will result in about 325,000 more people with multiple super accounts every year, at a cost of \$16 million per year," says Katrina Ellis, deputy CEO of Super Consumers Australia.

"Consumer protections aimed at putting an end to people having multiple super accounts were only introduced four years ago, but this draft legislation will undermine them."

Duplicate accounts could set you back \$50,000 by retirement thanks to multiple fees. We want to see the legislation amended to protect Australians from blatant advertising when they're starting a job.

ANTOINETTE DYCE

Another big penalty in the VET FEE-HELP loan scandal

The \$20 million penalty handed down in May by the Federal Court against Captain Cook College comes at the tail end of the outsized VET FEE-HELP loan scandal. In recent years, several other dodgy operators have also copped big fines for unconscionable conduct, including Unique International College, the Empower Institute, the Australian Institute of Professional Education, Acquire Learning, and the Phoenix Institute of Australia. The program was launched by the federal government in 2009 to help disadvantaged people earn diplomas in higher level vocational education and training, but many of these people became victims of industrial-scale fraud.

Like the other offenders, Captain Cook College received tens of millions of taxpayer dollars through the VET FEE-HELP program. About 5500 would-be students racked up debts totalling over \$60 million. Almost none of them ever completed any part of an online course, and around 86% of them never even logged in. For years, the business menaced these would-be students with threats about owing thousands to the government. Their debts, along with those of other victims of the VET FEE-HELP loan fiasco, eventually had to be waived by the government. In July 2023, the ACCC announced that around \$3.4 billion in VET FEE-HELP debt had been re-credited to over 185,000 students since 2016. Collectively, the wrongdoers copped around \$650 million in penalties.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN





Little savings in big pharmacies

CHOICE asked over 1000 consumers if they could tell if price tags at Chemist Warehouse, Priceline and Terry White represented a discount on the usual price, and whether they could quickly and easily determine this.

What we discovered was that around 1 in 3 people found it difficult to easily tell if promotional tags often found at pharmacies represented a discount. Many who assumed the tags indicated savings often overestimated the discounts on offer and some thought the reductions were based on prices the product may have never actually been sold for.

Promotional labels that refer to the recommended retail price (RRP) to suggest a discount can leave consumers confused. If the

RRP is not a price the pharmacy has previously charged, consumers may be misled about how much they're really saving. There has been a race to the bottom with these tactics, which makes it hard for businesses using transparent pricing to compete. You can read more about our findings on page 21.

CHOICE supports the government's commitment to regulate confusing supermarket price displays and promotions, but our research shows that confusing price displays are not limited to the supermarket aisle. Major retailers like pharmacies, department stores, pet stores and hardware chains routinely use similar pricing tactics and should be addressed next.

BEA SHERWOOD

ACCC cracks down on phoney NDIS endorsements

In November last year the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) put businesses on notice about advertising an endorsement by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) that didn't really exist. ACCC deputy chair Catriona Lowe said the ACCC was concerned "that many NDIS providers are claiming that certain products or services are 'NDIS approved', 'NDIS funded' or otherwise NDIS endorsed when this is not the case". The concern was well-founded.

In May, the ACCC slapped infringement notices on two businesses for exaggerating their NDIS credentials – the bedding retailer Bedshed and Thermomix Australia. The resulting penalties were \$39,600 and \$79,200, respectively. Bedshed's advertising misleadingly suggested that some of its products had been evaluated or approved by the NDIS, while Thermomix made false or misleading online claims suggesting that two of its household appliances were endorsed by the scheme.

"The NDIS does not provide specific approval for any particular goods or services," says ACCC chair Gina Cass-Gottlieb. "Each NDIS participant has unique needs, and what's funded under their plan is determined individually, not through a list of approved products. There are no categories of goods or services which are automatically NDIS approved or funded for all NDIS participants."

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



Uber's grip on Melbourne Airport loosens

Readers may remember that we recently wrote about whether Uber's market dominance in Australia was good for consumers or stifling competition (*CHOICE* May 25). In that story, we highlighted cases like Melbourne Airport, where

a secret commercial arrangement between Uber and the airport created Uber-exclusive passenger pick-up ranks outside the major terminals. This left customers wanting to take a taxi, or another rideshare company like Didi,

walking hundreds of metres in search of a pick-up.

But it seems Melbourne Airport has changed its tune. As of May, they've introduced new "split ranks" that allow Ubers, taxis and other rideshares to share access to the main terminal pick-up zones.

"We are making it easier for you to find a taxi or Uber when you arrive at Melbourne Airport. Extra taxi and Uber ranks zones have been created due to feedback from passengers, drivers and staff, and are designed to improve your access to transport," the airport website says.

In a win for Victorian consumers, passengers arriving at Melbourne Airport will now be able to choose what form of taxi or rideshare service they want to take. (Just don't ask when the train to the airport is due to be built.)

JARNI BLAKKARLY



Best travel insurance when you have a baby on board



What could be more important than making sure you're properly insured when you're travelling while pregnant? Pregnancy is covered by all the travel insurance policies we analyse, but the coverage varies. Most policies only provide cover up to 23 to 26 weeks gestation, and only a few cover childbirth – and usually only when labour has been brought about by an accident.

We rate policies for both the cover they provide and value for money. Tick Travel insurance, (both their Standard and Top policies), and InsureandGo Gold are the top-rated policies that cover pregnancies into the third trimester. They cover pregnancy up to the end of the 30th week for single pregnancies and earn a *CHOICE* Expert Rating of 66 or 67%.

The comprehensive policies from Southern Cross Travel Insurance and Qantas are the only two in our review that cover both childbirth and newborn care. But they only offer cover up to 23 weeks and 26 weeks, respectively, so you're only covered for a very premature birth. If you need cover for an IVF-assisted pregnancy your options are more limited. We recommend you look at Southern Cross Travel Insurance (SCTI) Comprehensive (*CHOICE* Expert Rating 69%), World2Cover Top (69%), Allianz Comprehensive (68%), or Worldcare Comprehensive (68%).

JANE BARDELL



RANTS AND RAVES

Telstra switched to upfront billing and I'm upfront annoyed



In March this year, Telstra switched its billing process from post-pay to pre-pay, or “upfront billing”, as they call it.

This means that instead of paying for services you've already used, you have to pay in advance for what you plan to take advantage of.

This is fine if you have all-inclusive services that are a fixed fee, such as an NBN connection, but if you rely on extras, such as making phone calls over VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), then it's no good at all.

But why would anyone still need VoIP and have to pay for phone calls these days? Well, my elderly parents rely on VoIP to make phone calls to Greece from their landline. This was easy when they could pay at the end of the service cycle. The NBN account was set up with a VoIP router with a telephone plugged into it and they could pay for however long they talked overseas. It wasn't expensive.

But with upfront billing, they can't pay after the fact and are restricted to

the 30 minutes included in their NBN plan. That's nowhere near enough when talking to different people multiple times across a week. They can make a one-off purchase of an extra 200 minutes for \$20, but that's still not going to meet their needs.

Their last Telstra bill before the telco changed to upfront billing shows they talked for 480 minutes across 24 calls, at a cost of only \$28. That means they've now lost a lot of value, in addition to the freedom to talk whenever and for however long they want.

Even when making a schedule and keeping a log of how long they've talked, it's hard to stick to it. It's caused a lot of stress for them and their relatives because they have to chew through the minutes quickly and then wait until Telstra's billing cycle renews at the end of the month to speak again.

My parents aren't technologically savvy, so using a smartphone with Wi-Fi calling is just not going to happen; their call recipients are on

regular landlines anyway. Calling cards are another level of frustration. Some claim to give you 200 minutes, but they charge in increments of anything from four minutes to 15-minute blocks. My parents would also have to enter an access number and a PIN each time and deal with complicated menu systems. No thanks.

My solution is to move them to a new internet service provider (ISP), which means getting their beloved phone number ported from Telstra. Seeing this done successfully is my number one priority: their number has been with them for well over 40 years, everyone they know has it and all their medical appointments rely on it to reach them, so it will be a huge pain if it's lost.

Here's hoping the move will be a success and I don't have to come back to this column with another rant about a lost number. Things may even go well, and I can finally rave about a positive telco experience.

ELIAS PLASTIRAS

They've now lost a lot of value, in addition to the freedom to talk whenever they want

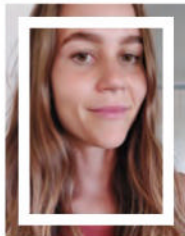


ASK THE EXPERTS

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

Q I recently bought a pair of ugg boots from a shop that sold mainly sheepskin products. There were signs all over the shop showing the “Australian made” logo, so I assumed I was browsing Australian-made sheepskin products. After buying my ugg boots and getting them home I checked the label inside the boot. Although it had an Australian flag on it, on closer inspection, the print underneath said “Made in China”. I feel I have been misled – is this legal?

A CHOICE journalist
Grace Smith



You're not alone in falling victim to this misleading practice – there are ongoing issues with ugg retailers trying to pass off imported products as Australian-made. In some cases, retailers have been fined by the ACCC for making false country of origin claims. Unfortunately, shoppers have to be very savvy when buying ugg boots

if they want to buy Australian-made. The only way to know for sure is to check for the “Made in Australia” rectangular swing tag on the boots themselves or check the sewn-in tag on the boots instore before buying. Don't pay any attention to advertising materials around the store, focus only on the product you're considering buying and beware of images or phrases that imply that something is Australian such as “Premium Australian”, “Classic Australian design” or “Australian classic”. If the store where you bought them had “Australian made” signs up, it probably means some of the products they sell are made in Australia. You could try returning the boots, explaining the problem and asking for a refund or to swap them for a pair that are genuinely made in Australia. Once you've got a pair you're happy with, make sure you look after them properly – head to page 28 for our guide on caring for your ugs.



ASK US

Email your question to asktheexperts@choice.com.au or write to Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204. You can also tap into the ‘brains trust’ at www.choice.community.

Q I want to replace my 20-year-old convection microwave and I'm looking for a few key features – can you help me? Firstly, I'd like the new model to



rotate a full 360 degrees during the cooking time, so that the cup or bowl ends up in the exact same place as where I placed it originally. Secondly, I've noticed that a lot of modern units are very light, so when you push the open-door button the whole unit moves backwards – I'd like a model that stays put.

A CHOICE home economist Fiona Mair:

If it's important to you that your plate or bowl ends up in the same position as where you placed it, you



might want to consider a flatbed style microwave (rather than one with a turntable). Flatbed models don't rotate at all, so your container will stay in the same position throughout the cooking process. As for your second requirement,

we have noticed that some of the lighter freestanding microwaves do slide on some surfaces. We make a note of this in our reviews. You can also head instore to check out which models feel sturdier.



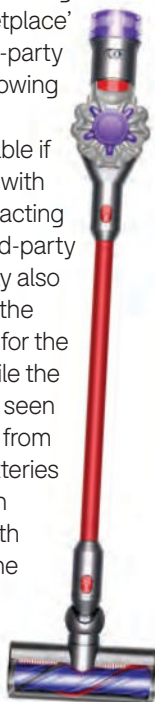
Q I'm replacing my third Dyson V8 battery in as many years. Dyson sells them for \$139, and Bunnings sells the same battery type for \$69. They are lithium-ion batteries and are left continually on charge when the vacuum cleaner is not being used. My inclination is to buy from Dyson from a safety point of view, but when you can get two from Bunnings for the price of one from Dyson, it's hard not to be tempted. What's your advice?



A **CHOICE**
small appliance expert
Adian Lini: I would personally always buy from Dyson directly even though the

price is significantly higher.

The Bunnings battery is being sold online via a 'Marketplace' seller. By buying a third-party battery, you risk not knowing its quality, and are now introducing a new variable if you ever have an issue with the vacuum when contacting either Dyson or the third-party battery company. It may also be a risk if you're using the original Dyson charger for the third-party battery. While the chances are low, we've seen reports of fires starting from stick vacuum Li-ion batteries malfunctioning while on charge. It could be worth looking elsewhere online to see if you can find official or genuine Dyson batteries sold cheaper.



ASK THE EXPERTS

Consumer case study

Dodging responsibilities

CHOICE staffer Amanda's coffee machine experienced a major failure and stopped working after just two years. The product was outside its warranty period, but Amanda felt that it should still be covered by her rights under Australia Consumer Law (ACL). So, she got in touch with the retailer and explained that she was seeking a remedy under the ACL on the basis that the coffee machine was not of 'acceptable quality' due to its lack of durability, evidenced by its total failure after just two years.

The retailer involved the manufacturer and what followed was about 20 back-and-forth emails over the course of four weeks, with Amanda constantly having to follow up.

During this process, both the manufacturer and the retailer repeatedly referred to the product being "out of warranty", despite Amanda clearly and consistently communicating that she was requesting a remedy under the ACL, not under her warranty.

After many emails and being no closer to a resolution, Amanda asked to escalate the matter to a supervisor or someone in a position of authority at the manufacturer, but these requests were denied. She was told no names or positions could be provided due to "confidentiality", which felt to her like a clear way to avoid accountability.

Finally, exhausting all other options, and with both the manufacturer and the retailer failing to offer to inspect the faulty appliance, suggest alternatives, or propose any solution beyond advising her to go and pay for an assessment and possible repair herself, Amanda lodged a formal complaint with NSW Fair Trading. She says only then did the retailer begin to engage with her more seriously.

The retailer eventually offered her a \$200 voucher as a "goodwill gesture", which she accepted to bring the matter to a close and replace the appliance. They also price-matched the replacement she chose with a lower price she'd seen online and allowed her to apply the voucher to the purchase, even though this went against their usual policy. Even so, she was still out of pocket for the difference between the voucher and the cost of the replacement machine. So, while she did receive something from the retailer, she didn't receive a remedy under the ACL – she feels the solution provided was just a way for the manufacturer and retailer to put the issue to rest without taking accountability.

This case study goes to show that even with all the consumer rights knowledge of a CHOICE staff member, it can still be unreasonably difficult to get a remedy under ACL.

YOUR SAY

If you've had a bad experience, been ripped off or scammed, tell us and help other CHOICE members avoid the same traps. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

CONTACT US!

Email us at
yoursay@choice.com.au
 or write to Your Say,
 CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road,
 Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Separation anxiety

I am a very long-time *CHOICE* subscriber and I have been married for many years, with more to come. Regarding your article, *Economic injustices* (*CHOICE* Apr 25), many separating couples are blaming the courts, the systems, solicitors etc. for delayed court hearings, exorbitant costs or lack of government funding or legal aid. The government needs to get smart and introduce efficient, alternate solutions because they can't keep throwing money at issues like these and bogging down the courts.

Thousands of people go before the courts for divorce or separation agreements when often, they just need

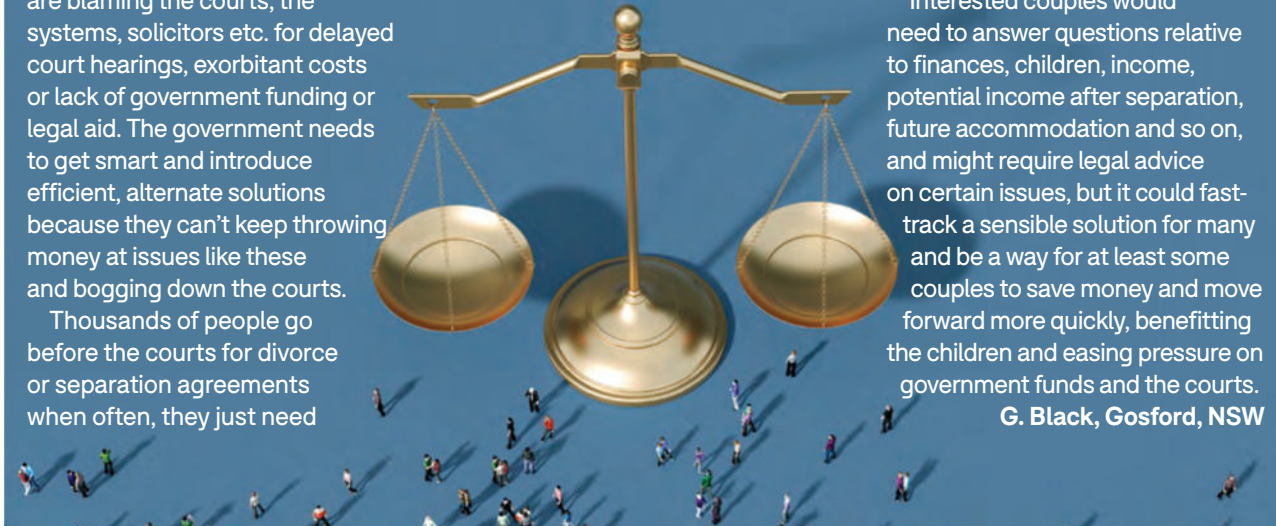
a fair, quick, low-cost, commonsense agreement with minimal interference from the legal profession.

It shouldn't be too hard to develop a program based on past separation case studies to provide fair guidelines

and recommended outcomes. Couples seeking a fast and fair outcome could opt in to such a program and move on with their lives, while others may still choose the existing system.

Interested couples would need to answer questions relative to finances, children, income, potential income after separation, future accommodation and so on, and might require legal advice on certain issues, but it could fast-track a sensible solution for many and be a way for at least some couples to save money and move forward more quickly, benefitting the children and easing pressure on government funds and the courts.

G. Black, Gosford, NSW



Our oven-warming drawer stopped working after four years. The Bosch serviceman noticed that the original installers had left in some packing fittings, which was the ultimate cause of the computer board failure as the drawer couldn't close properly. Despite being out of warranty, he replaced the board free of charge and did not even charge for a call-out. This was great and honest service by Bosch as we would otherwise have been none the wiser and would have had to pay about \$500.

Clive Hunt, Perth, WA





I had a Breville Smart Kettle which ceased to function after three years of excellent use. It was beyond the warranty period. After providing all of the information requested, Breville advised that they will send me a new kettle. Great customer service!

Doug Vorbach, Narwee, NSW



The steam wand on my Nespresso machine (Breville Creatista Plus) recently stopped working. The machine was out of warranty, but less than three years old and only used at home in the kitchen. I contacted Nespresso support and they suggested replacing the steam tip. It only cost me \$12.78 and they covered shipping.

However, this didn't fix the problem, so I contacted them again. They said I had two options: purchase a new machine at a reduced price, or send the faulty machine to their repairer for assessment and, if possible, a repair. I chose to have the machine repaired.

Nespresso emailed me a shipping label and instructions on how to pack the machine for transport, and I sent it off. I was notified when it arrived, when it had been assessed and when it was being sent back. The repaired machine was returned; Nespresso covered the cost of shipping both ways and did not charge me for the repair. Their customer service was excellent throughout the whole process.

C. Stone, Perth, WA



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CHOICE SOCIAL MEDIA

Join the conversation online. We're on Facebook, Threads, Instagram and our own forum, CHOICE Community. This month: Cheque refunds, QR codes and slow cookers.

Community @choice.community



Have you received a refund by cheque?

PhilT: I recently received a cheque from GMHBA for a long defunct private health policy, related to their billing error. I mentioned to GMHBA customer service that an increasing number of people do not have the ability to deposit cheques.

TomK: AGL sent me a refund cheque late last year. First one I'd seen in nearly 10 years. My bank had no problems with it, but it took a few days to 'clear'.

nikkig: Here in Tasmania, if we lose our electricity service for over a certain amount of time, we receive compensation from TasNetworks. In the last year we have been sent two cheques, each for \$80. As we are internet bankers, the only way we could cash these was to deposit them in our bank account using Australia Post, who then charge for the service, and it takes eight days for the cheque to clear.

Glenn61: I received a cheque relating to the refund of a cancelled insurance policy. I couldn't deposit the cheque as it was made payable to two people. The bank would only accept the cheque if both parties opened a joint account.



Facebook @choiceaustralia



Should you buy a slow cooker?

Davina B: Fabulous when you make a big pot of soup, put it in the slow cooker on low heat and have it ready to serve hot all day.



Heather E: Nope. Slow cookers have this magical ability to make EVERYTHING taste exactly the same.

Louise C: Unpopular opinion, I hate my house smelling like food all day. 🍲

Anna K: Love our slow cooker. Such a good purchase during the first Covid lockdown.

Ann E: My beef and red wine casserole makes me look forward to the cold weather every year. 🍷

Michael T: Convenient way to use solar and avoid higher cost of network power for evening meals.

Instagram @choiceaustralia



What do you think about ANZ replacing opening-hours signs on bank windows with QR codes?

becklonzar: Why wouldn't they just print the hours? It's not like bank hours are complicated? 🤔

ash.rawson: Not everyone has a smartphone. I have a Nokia brick and use my laptop for everything.

stronger.amy: It just seems like such a weird choice, so many banks have screens in their front windows, why not have opening hours on these when closed?

cabraleather: Obviously 'customer service' means nothing to them.

kickztoysandotherstuff: If you can print a QR code, you can print your hours. ■



Data hacks and phishing schemes are helping more criminals steal phone numbers, with devastating consequences, writes **Liam Kennedy**

Imagine you've just found out you're being scammed. Someone is moving money out of your bank account and you've lost access to your email and other vital online services.

You pick up your phone, but realise you've suddenly lost signal and, with it, any easy way of quickly shutting down the pilfering happening right in front of you.

This is what it's like to encounter a SIM swap or phone porting scam and find yourself unnervingly disconnected in your hour of need.

Older scam finding new life

SIM swap and phone porting scams have been around for several years. They've been the target of

crackdowns by the federal police and by Australia's communications regulator, which, since 2020, has introduced requirements for telcos that aim to make these scams harder to carry out.

But cracks have emerged in the system designed to protect consumers from these fraudulent operations, and one support group says it's seeing more and more devastated victims come forward.

Someone is moving money out of your bank account and you've lost access to your email

How the scam works

SIM swap and phone porting scams are abuses of legitimate processes that telcos have in place to support customers.

A SIM swap is a function that allows someone to have their existing SIM card cancelled and their number

NEED TO KNOW

- Scammers are abusing telco processes to steal people's mobile phone numbers and cause havoc with personal finances.
- Telcos have been directed to crack down on these scams, but support groups say cases have increased and victims are being left traumatised.
- You can protect your phone number by guarding your personal details, avoiding suspicious texts and calls and acting quickly if you lose service.

moved to another SIM card. Phone porting is when you seek to have your phone number moved to a new telco from your previous provider.

Both processes can result in calls and messages to your number being diverted to a new device.

SIM swap and phone porting scams occur when one of these processes happens without you having requested it. Instead, it's been initiated by someone impersonating you in order to divert your texts and calls to a device they control.

In some cases, victims of the scam are completely unaware this has gone on until they suddenly lose cellular service.

"It comes out of the blue," says Kathy Sundstrom, national manager for outreach and engagement at IDCare, a cyber support service helping scam victims.

"The first thing you want to do when something has gone wrong is phone someone, but you can't. It's incredibly disempowering when you're not able to have any kind of phone contact."

MOBILE NUMBERS ARE KEY TO IDENTITY THEFT

Once they've commandeered a mobile number, scammers will be able to receive the text messages often sent by organisations to authenticate and confirm sensitive changes to personal details and accounts.

This can deliver criminals the ability to change passwords and take control of emails, bank accounts and other vital services, providing them ample opportunity for theft.

"It sets off a chain of events," says David Hofierka, senior policy officer at the Consumer Action Law Centre, another organisation supporting victims of SIM swap and phone porting scams.

"The perpetrator changes [the victim's] email, takes out loans in their name and steals

money from their accounts. The customer is helpless and can get really traumatised."

Advocates say this takeover of an individual's identity via their phone is often compounded by the fact many of us now rely completely on mobiles to make calls and get help. They've heard stories of victims having to go to their neighbours for help after their number was stolen while home alone.

Porting theft 'like a physical attack'

Sydney resident TJ (not his real name) witnessed the effects of a phone porting scam first-hand when his wife's mobile number was stolen and moved to a new carrier.

The couple first discovered something was wrong when TJ received a notification claiming \$3000 had been moved out of one of their joint accounts. At the same time, his wife's phone couldn't connect to its usual service provider.

"When she was calling them the following morning, she was told that her number had been ported to another carrier," he explains.

"[It] was only the beginning of a whole process, a web of financial scams that affected us. Not only did we have that unauthorised \$3000 transfer, we found out that simultaneously the scammers had opened credit accounts [and that] my wife's Service NSW, ATO [Australian Tax Office] and Google accounts had been taken over."

TJ says they eventually got the ported number shut down, and he and his wife were able to clear their name of the approximately \$15,000 worth of loans, tax refunds and credit lines the scammers had obtained.

But they continue to come across more instances where the criminals have sought to impersonate them.

TJ says the long-term effort to wrench back control of their finances and accounts has taken a particular toll on his wife.

"It's like a physical attack, it's brutal," he says.

How scammers are stealing numbers

Because it requires passing themselves off as someone else, scammers need a significant amount of personal information to successfully initiate a SIM swap or port. These personal details can

be collected via phishing – a type of information theft increasingly common around this time of the year.

Banks whose customers have been impacted by SIM swap and phone porting scams say victims may initially receive emails or text

messages claiming to be from the ATO. These sort of impersonation schemes are commonly rolled out at the end of the financial year, a time when people are filing tax returns and expecting to hear from the tax office.

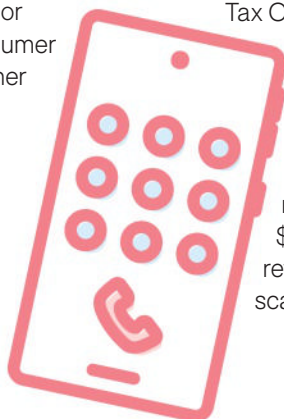
Tax-time phishing scams often encourage victims to provide information like their full name, mobile number and address in order to secure refunds or protect their account – details that can be used to attempt a fraudulent SIM swap or phone port.

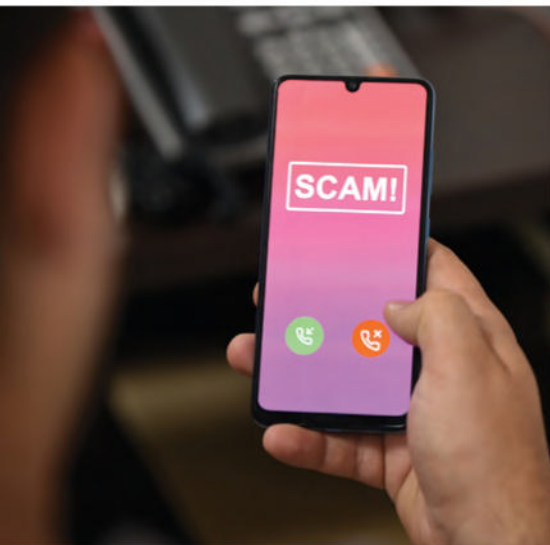
In addition to this information, scammers can also weaponise personal details that have been exposed in a data breach or hack of customer files at a large company.

PUTTING ON AN ACT

Once they have enough of your information, scammers will then contact your telco pretending to be you and try to convince them ▶

"The customer is helpless and can get really traumatised"





to transfer your number to a device they control. They may also fabricate a story about a lost phone, being in trouble and needing a new device to put pressure on staff to transfer the number.

If a telco sends messages to the holder of the number to authenticate the request, the criminal party may also contact that person and pose as the service provider or another organisation in order to obtain any authentication codes.

Cases on the rise

SIM swap and phone porting scams pose enough of a threat that telcos have recently been directed to put in place processes to reduce the chance of unknowingly approving fraudulent requests.

Between 2020 and 2022, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) introduced rules requiring service providers to use multi-factor authentication to confirm that the person controlling the phone number is actually the one making the request to transfer it.

ACMA says these regulations led to a “significant decrease” in SIM swap and phone porting fraud, but the system hasn’t always been as effective as hoped. For example, last

year the regulator fined Telstra more than \$1.5 million for not properly authenticating customer identities during 168,000 “high-risk interactions”, including SIM swaps. Furthermore, IDCare says that although ACMA’s rules initially had a positive impact, the number of mobile fraud victims seeking help is again on the rise. The number of people contacting IDCare following an unauthorised SIM swap or phone port climbed from a monthly average of 34 over 2023, to 89 in the 12 months to March this year, an increase of over 160%.

Recent police action also shows the continued popularity of the phone porting method – in March this year, the federal police charged a Melbourne man for allegedly trying to port 86 different mobile numbers.

WHAT’S BEING DONE?

IDCare says a recent spate of data breaches affecting major companies could be delivering scammers more information on Australian consumers, making it easier to perform unauthorised SIM swaps and ports.

An ACMA spokesperson tells CHOICE that the regulator is in the process of working out what’s behind the rise in this type of scam. In the meantime, they say that ACMA will continue to enforce the existing regulations on telcos requiring them to carefully authenticate requests for SIM swaps and phone ports.

Telcos are reluctant to share detailed information about how they handle SIM swap and porting requests, but Telstra and Optus tell CHOICE they have multi-factor authentication processes in place. On their websites, both telcos say these processes can include customers putting information into their respective apps or completing an instore ID check.

Telstra notes that while its procedures are “strict and robust”, criminals could potentially bypass them if a victim’s identity has been thoroughly compromised. ■

How to avoid being scammed

1. Be alert to phishing attempts:

Never share sensitive personal or financial details on suspicious websites or in response to dubious phone calls or messages.

2. Beware of changes to your phone service:

Look out for unexpected messages suggesting you’re leaving your telco or requesting a new SIM. Don’t call any numbers in these messages, even if you initiated a service change. They may lead to a scammer. Instead, contact your provider using details you’ve found yourself to discuss.

3. Be sceptical of calls asking for codes:

Watch out for unexpected authentication messages from your telco and hang up on anyone calling to ask for these codes.

4. Act quickly if you lose connection:

If your phone starts unexpectedly displaying “SOS only” and you lose service, check your online accounts for any sign of compromise. Contact your bank and telco and tell them you’re the target of fraud. Contact IDCare on 1800 595 160 or idcare.org for further assistance.





Deal or no deal?

Shelf labels at popular pharmacy chains are making consumers think deals are better than they really are. **Liam Kennedy** explains

Shelves lined with colourful specials tags are a common sight greeting shoppers at major Australian chemist chains. But new data suggests these labels are confusing consumers and leading them to overestimate the savings they offer.

CHOICE has been getting feedback from Australians on the specials labels Chemist Warehouse, Terry White and Priceline put on their shelves. A sizeable portion of consumers we surveyed could not easily tell if these tags represented a discount.

Those who did believe they signalled savings tended to overestimate the discounts on offer, because some pharmacies were promising reprieve from prices they never charged in the first place.

Those who did believe the tags signalled savings tended to overestimate the discounts on offer

Promotional tags not so special

“We regularly hear from consumers who are frustrated by how prices are displayed at many major pharmacies,” says Bea Sherwood, senior campaigns and policy adviser at CHOICE.

“Discounts are everywhere you go in pharmacies. Walking down ▶

NEED TO KNOW

- New data shows discount promotions at popular pharmacies are confusing consumers.
- Tags highlighting savings are referring to prices pharmacies may never have charged in the first place.
- The promotions are causing consumers to think pharmacy deals are saving them more money than they really are.

the aisles, you're bombarded by yellow and pink sales tags."

CHOICE has found that many of these tags are placed over the top of a product's usual shelf price. Some displayed a new price for the product, while others simply drew attention to the existing price with bright colours and phrases proclaiming value for money.

Consumer confusion

To see how these promotions might be influencing consumers, CHOICE showed photos of promotional tags we found in Chemist Warehouse, Terry White and Priceline stores to more than 1000 Australians (for more details, see 'About our survey' on page 23).

The photos depicted the promotions as they were found in outlets around Sydney in November last year.

In the cases of Chemist Warehouse and Terry White, the promotions were often covering the shelf sticker that showed the price the product was usually sold for, and proclaimed a new 'special' rate.



Some labels promised savings on prices the chemist wasn't actually charging.

The tags contrasted this promotional rate with a figure they said was the product's recommended retail price (RRP), in order to highlight a dollar-value saving available to shoppers.



CHOICE supporters are frustrated by the number of specials tags in pharmacies.

Tags at Priceline didn't claim a specific discount amount, but drew attention to a product's going rate with phrases such as "Great value" and "Lower prices".

We asked the consumers we surveyed whether they believed the tags represented a discount on a product's usual price and how easy it was to ascertain this.

"One of the most striking results was that roughly a third of respondents across the labels we tested either were not able to quickly and easily determine if the product was discounted, or they weren't sure if it was discounted at all," says Sherwood.

"That is a real concern, as discounts should be clear and transparent, not confusing. Clear discounts help shoppers know if they're really getting a good deal."

STORES ASKED TO COMMENT
Chemist Warehouse and Terry White didn't respond when we asked if they wanted to comment on the suggestions that their specials are confusing.

Priceline told CHOICE that its "Love Lower Prices" label did represent a discount, but that the "Great Value" label didn't.

Miscalculating discounts

Respondents who believed promotional tag prices represented a saving on the product's usual price were asked how much they thought



the discount was worth. In most cases, they used the RRP listed on the tag to calculate how much they were saving by buying the promoted product.

For example, respondents were shown a photo of a tag accompanying a tube of toothpaste being sold at a Terry White store. The tag listed the product's \$6 price as a discount from its RRP of \$11.99, and 71% of survey respondents agreed that the sticker represented a \$5.99 saving on the product's usual price.

However, lifting the tag revealed that the usual shelf price for this product didn't match the RRP. Rather, it was \$8.99. Terry White later confirmed to CHOICE that the toothpaste hadn't been sold at that store at the RRP mentioned on the tag.

In fact, in all the examples we found of pharmacies using the RRP to advertise savings, these prices were more expensive than the usual shelf listings beneath or beside the tags.

What does the RRP actually mean?

Information provided by Chemist Warehouse and Terry White suggests many of their displayed RRP list prices that consumers may never actually have to pay.

Terry White tells us the RRP mentioned on its tags are prices given to it by the suppliers of those

items and aren't meant to reference a price the products were previously sold for by that store.

Chemist Warehouse didn't respond to our question about whether the products we found were ever sold for their listed RRP. But on its website, the retailer says RRP's listed in savings comparisons online are usually a supplier's recommended price.

The company says it only displays these RRP's if the product was sold at or above that price in at least 5% of transactions across most major and independent pharmacies in Australia in the previous two months.

Chemist Warehouse monitors those transactions by looking at Australian Pharmacy Transaction data provided by IQVIA, a global healthcare data technology.

'Potentially misleading'

The ACCC says a price display can be misleading if it's being compared to an RRP that the product was never sold at, or wasn't sold at for a reasonable time.

With over half of survey respondents regularly referring to RRP's when calculating the value of pharmacy promotions, Sherwood says many consumers may be overestimating the value of deals on offer.

"If the pharmacies have never offered those products at that RRP, it could be potentially misleading to refer to a dollar-value reduction from the RRP as the selling point of the discount," she explains.

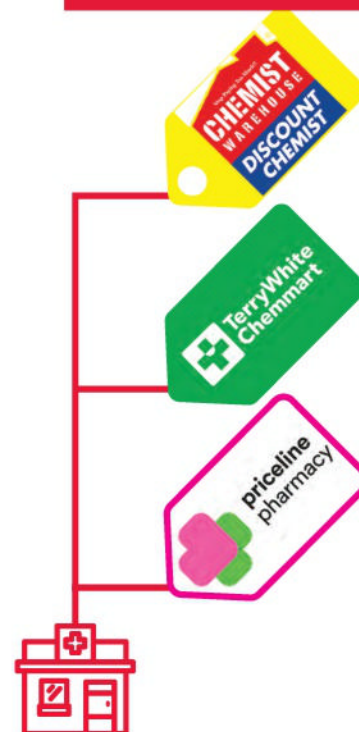
"This practice might make a consumer more likely to think that a product is good value, when in fact the savings may be much smaller than they appear. Consumers could end up purchasing more than they need or not bothering to compare prices with other retailers."

Chemist Warehouse and Terry White didn't respond when asked to comment on suggestions their promotions are potentially misleading. Terry White has previously told CHOICE it lists supplier-provided RRP's in order to provide a reference for savings calculations in instances where pricing is varied across its network of pharmacies.

How to tell if it's a good deal

When presented with a pharmacy special claiming to shave a certain amount off your shop, don't just rely on the advertised RRP when appraising these deals.

Look beneath the special tag for the usual shelf price to see how much of a reduction it is on what the product usually sells



for at that store – this will tell you if the deal is worth taking advantage of by buying multiple units, for example.

It also pays to compare the price a pharmacy is advertising with the going rate for the same product at other outlets, and look at unit pricing to see where you could be getting better value across brands and pack sizes. ■

About our survey

CHOICE Consumer Pulse January 2025 is based on an online survey designed and analysed by CHOICE. 1077 Australian households responded to the survey with quotas applied to ensure coverage across all age groups, genders and locations in each state and territory across metropolitan and regional areas. The data was weighted to ensure it is representative of the Australian population based in the 2021 ABS Census data. Fieldwork was conducted from 14 to 31 January, 2025.



CHOICE got feedback from consumers on a number of different pharmacy labels.



Clothed for winter



Rainy days and piles of washing getting you down?
Pru Engel has some tips to defeat the damp

There comes a time in your life when the highlight of a sunny day isn't the beach or a picnic – it's finally getting the chance to conquer that mountain of laundry.

While the Bureau of Meteorology tipped this winter to be one of Australia's warmest on record, the rainfall outlook is less predictable, and many regions are in for their fair share of soggy days. Not ideal if your laundry basket seems to refill itself overnight.

So, what's the best wet weather plan when it's bucketing outside? Drying laundry indoors can invite mould and moisture into your home and leave a musty pong on your clothes.

From smarter washing habits to clever drying strategies, here are our top tips for turbocharging your laundry routine and saving your sanity through the wettest months of the year.



1. Check your washing machine

Before you even think about how you're going to dry the load, check that you're using the most effective spin cycle on your washing machine. You want as much water as possible to be removed from the clothes during the washing process. Front loader washing machines are better for this, as they tend to have much faster spin cycles than top loaders. We give the washing machines we test a score for spin efficiency, so check the results of our latest washing machine test (*CHOICE* Feb 25). Ensure you don't overload your washing machine, as this can prevent clothes from getting as dry as possible during the spin cycle. And if you're doing multiple loads in one day, do the heavier items first (jeans, towels, etc.) so they have more time to dry.

A dehumidifier can be used to help your clothes dry faster and reduce the risk of mould and dust



2. Maximise air circulation

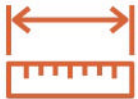
Drying laundry is mainly about putting your clothes in a space with air that's sufficiently dry to absorb the evaporating moisture. Outdoors is usually better for this as the air is often warmer (on a sunny day) and better circulated. But if it's really cold outside, and obviously if it's wet, you'll have to bring the laundry indoors. In this case, you need to create air circulation artificially. This can be done with a fan, air conditioner or dehumidifier.

A dehumidifier can be used to help your clothes dry faster, and reduce the risk of mould and dust that can result from drying your laundry indoors. Over half the models in our latest review of dehumidifiers (see page 55) have a specific laundry setting for this purpose. This function helps dry washing more efficiently indoors by pulling excess moisture from the air. They're no match for tumble dryers, but *CHOICE* experts say they're still a great option if you don't have outdoor drying space, especially during colder months.

“The moisture has to go somewhere, and if your home doesn’t have good airflow to let moist air escape, you can end up with damp walls and furniture – perfect conditions for mould,” says CHOICE expert Chris Barnes.

Good air circulation and efficient hanging of your garments is everything when it comes to drying laundry indoors on wet days. Some air conditioners also have specific ‘Dry Mode’ or ‘Dehumidifier Mode’ functions that are designed to remove excess moisture from the air, which can also be helpful for drying clothes indoors.

And you can always go old school and use a pedestal or tower fan in the same room where you’re drying washing to help circulate air. Our testing finds that pedestal fans are usually better than tower fans at delivering strong gusts of air that’ll help with this.



3. Leave a metre for heaters

While you might be tempted to drape clothes over a heater or place your clothes airer or racks quite close to a heater with a fan, this can be both unsafe and costly.

“Damp clothes hung directly in front of a heater, or over it, can not only be a fire hazard but could increase your heating bills, as they act as a barrier and potentially prevent your heater

from releasing warmth into the room,” says Barnes.

“This means your heater will have to work harder to create a warmer temperature, which adds up to higher energy bills.”



4. Avoid over-washing clothes

Have you got kids who indiscriminately chuck clothes in the laundry basket, dirty or not? Do you wash your jeans after every wear? How frequently you wash your clothes obviously depends on your personal preferences and habits, but consider whether there are some items you could relax with a little on the washing front.

Not only will this mean fewer items to dry on rainy days, but you’ll reduce the impact of your laundry routine on the environment and, in many cases, it could extend the lifetime of your garments. A recent report from Sustainability Victoria suggests it’s likely that we’re washing our clothes too frequently.

While you should definitely continue washing your undies and sweaty gym gear after every wear, the research from Sustainability Victoria says jeans should be washed after at least 10 days of wear. If cared for correctly, one pair should last us four years, with 300 days of wear.



5. Clothes dryers can be costly

While it’s tempting to transfer everything straight from the washing machine to the dryer on a rainy day, keep in mind that this can be an expensive exercise. Not to mention, many clothes aren’t suitable for tumble-drying and could shrink or be ruined. Turn to the next page for our ultimate guide to what you can and can’t put in your dryer.

Some dryers can be very inefficient, so if you’re drying several times a day, you’re likely to see an increase in your energy bills that could reach into the hundreds.

How much more you’ll pay depends on factors such as how much you use the dryer, how old your clothes dryer is, how clean the filters are and what type of dryer it is. Heat pump dryers are more efficient and therefore cheaper to run than vented dryers, for example. See our latest clothes dryer test (CHOICE Apr 25) to compare running costs for different models. ►

How to hang your washing for faster drying

- Don’t overcrowd the airer – more airflow means faster drying.
- Ensure arms of wet shirts and legs of trousers aren’t tucked in or bunched up.
- Hang shirts from the bottom end (with pegs) rather than doubling them/folding over the line.
- Hang wet business shirts or blouses on coat hangers before hanging them on your line to maximise space and airing.
- Hang your washing on a portable airer or rack that you can easily move outside if the sun happens to pop out (or that you can move around the house to warmer spots depending on what time of day it is).



Mastering your dryer

When it's cold out and your washing's wet, it's tempting to just chuck everything in the dryer – but should you? While some fabrics might be unbothered by the heat of a tumble dryer, others will turn up their toes unless they're gently air-dried. With the potential for permanent damage, it's vital to know which is which before you put on a load.

The golden rule? When in doubt, air dry it. Your clothes, wallet and the environment will thank you for opting for sun-powered drying. Not running your dryer will save you money and won't shrink your threads – so you'll have more cash left over to spend on additions to your wardrobe!

Of course, some days you're just going to have to use a dryer. Here's our winter guide to what can go in the dryer, what never should, and how to use it effectively.

TIPS TO AVOID SHRINKAGE

No one wants to see their favourite or most expensive shirt accidentally reduced to a crop top. Here are our expert tips to avoid any shrinkage shocks:

- Always follow the garment's care instructions. Don't chuck it in and hope for the best.
- Over-drying can shrink and damage clothes over time, so ensure you're not pumping hot air through already-dry clothes.
- If you have a simple vented dryer that just uses a timer, use the warm setting, not hot.
- For dryers with several program options, choose the most appropriate program for the fabric.

- Sort through the load and keep fabrics of a similar weight together – for instance, sheets together, towels together and clothes together.
- If you're planning to use a dryer, select the highest spin speed on your washing machine to remove as much moisture as possible so you don't need the dryer as long.
- If in doubt, don't put it in the dryer. You might have to wait a while for it to air dry, but it's worth it to make sure your clothes don't shrink.

If it's a little too late for these tips and you're now wondering how to fix a jumper or jeans you've accidentally shrunk, all may not be lost.

For woollen jumpers, re-wet them, then pack them out with towels and the like to stretch them back into shape, then leave them to dry flat out of direct sunlight. For jeans, squeeze into them, then sit in a warm bath and move around in them to stretch them back out.

Select the highest spin speed to remove as much moisture as possible so you don't need the dryer as long

DRYER SYMBOLS

While the symbols on clothes tags look something like hieroglyphics, they actually contain lots of information about how to care for the fabric. Learn to identify the symbols for tumble drying and you'll be able to quickly check if you can throw those new jeans in the dryer, rather than risking it.

Look for symbols that have a square with a circle in it: these relate to tumble drying.



One dot:
Use low heat.



Two dots:
Use medium heat.



Three dots:
Use high heat.



No dots: Can be tumble dried, but no specific recommendations for heat.



X or cross:
Don't tumble dry.



Can it go in the dryer?

Here's what our laundry expert says you can and can't put in the clothes dryer (after checking the care label first, of course).



FABRIC/ITEM	CAN IT GO IN THE DRYER?	EXPERT COMMENTS
Acrylic	✓	Only use low heat settings, and don't leave acrylic clothes in for too long.
Activewear	✗	
Bags	✗	100% cotton bags are okay, but everything else should be air-dried.
Bath mats	It depends	Cotton bath mats are fine in the dryer, but mats with rubber backing should only be air dried.
Cashmere	✗	
Cotton	It depends	Cotton blend fabrics are usually fine, but 100% cotton and loose-woven cotton items are more likely to shrink. Use a lower heat for lighter garments like T-shirts.
Denim	✓	Be cautious about tumble drying stretchy jeans – the Spandex might not like the heat. 100% cotton denim is fine.
Doonas	It depends	Polyester and cotton doonas are fine in the dryer. Doonas made of wool should always be air dried. Some feather and down doonas can go in the dryer – check the care label first.
Faux leather/vegan leather	✗	
Fur/faux fur	✗	
Hosiery (stockings, tights etc.)	✗	
Lace	✗	
Leather and suede	✗	
Linen	It depends	Pre-washed linen can go in the dryer, but use a low heat or delicate cycle. It's best to err on the side of caution and air-dry linen items.
Microfibre	✓	Use a low heat or cool setting.
Nylon	✓	Use a low heat or cool setting.
Pillows	It depends	Polyester pillows can be tumble dried. Use a low heat or cool setting. Check regularly to see if they're dry. Bamboo and memory foam pillows should not be tumble dried. Some feather and down pillows can go in the dryer – check the care label first.
Polyester	✓ but check care label	Polyester dries quickly so you may not even need to tumble dry polyester clothes.
Rayon	✗	
Sequinned, beaded or embellished clothes	✗	
Shoes	It depends	Many dryers come with drying racks, which are a platform that sits inside the dryer and doesn't spin. These are designed for items like shoes, but not all shoes are suitable. Sneakers and running shoes are often okay.
Spandex and lycra	Generally not	Check the care label – some items can go in the dryer, but the higher the percentage of spandex, the more likely it'll be damaged by the heat.
Silk	✗	
Swimwear	✗	
Velvet	✗	
Wool	✗	Check the label as some wool blends may be okay to dry on a dedicated woollens program. It's still safer to air dry woollen items to avoid shrinkage.

ALICE RICHARD ►

How to clean your ugg boots

Uggs are an iconic Aussie winter staple, but they're not the sturdiest shoe out there. Their snugly wool interiors and soft suede outer make them super comfy, but these materials also require proper care and maintenance, especially if you want to avoid the dreaded stinky slipper.

Unfortunately, it's not a simple matter of popping them in the washing machine. Experts tell us washing them this way this will permanently damage the inners, knotting the wool and removing the natural lanolin that keeps them feeling soft and comfortable.

HOW TO CLEAN THE OUTSIDE

Todd Watts, director of Australian-owned ugg manufacturer 'Ugg Since 1974', says the main challenge of cleaning ugg boots is avoiding discolouring them.

"Sheepskin suede is so porous it will absorb anything," says Watts. "This means if you have to wet the suede in the cleaning process, you'll end up with a darker patch on the section you've cleaned."

He says using liquid to clean your uggs should be a last resort.

"Try cleaning your boots with a suede brush, dry cloth, chalk or gum eraser first," he says. "If you do end up using water, give both boots an all-over clean so they appear the same colour after cleaning."

Removing liquid stains (e.g. water, oil, mud)

1. Rub plain white chalk on the stained areas and leave it to sit overnight.
2. Use a suede brush (a nail brush or toothbrush will also do) to lightly buff off excess chalk, then rub the affected area against a clean area of sheepskin to remove the chalky residue.

Removing other stains

1. For more serious stains such as pen marks, use a colourless gum eraser to gently buff away the stain.
2. If the stain is particularly stubborn, Watts recommends using a very light sandpaper to buff away – extremely gently – the colour of the stain.

HOW TO CLEAN THE INSIDE

Watts says if you avoid wearing socks and ensure your feet are clean and dry before you put them on, the inners should stay clean and odour-free. But if they do get dirty or smelly, try this:

Deep clean

1. Lightly dampen a cloth and scrub the interiors. Try plain water first, as soap can strip the wool's natural wax called lanolin.



Some boots have interchangeable inner soles so you can swap out the existing sole for a fluffy new one

2. Dry your boots in a shady, well-ventilated area for 24–48 hours.
3. If still dirty, apply mild soap or detergent to a damp cloth and repeat the cleaning process.
4. Rinse the cloth thoroughly, wring it out and use it to remove any soap residue. Then repeat the drying process.

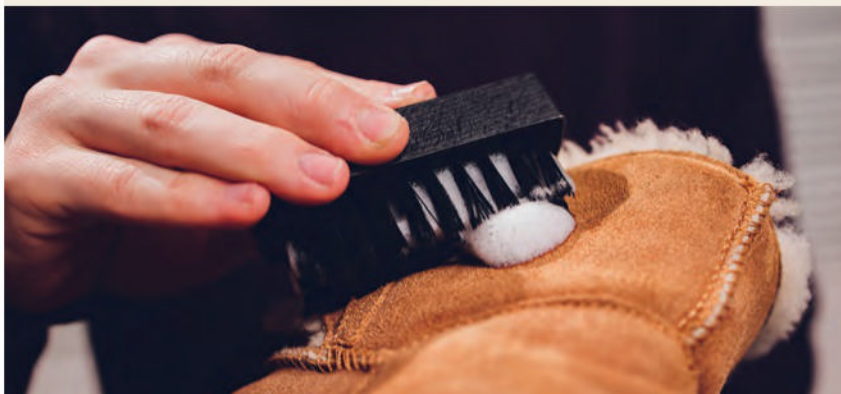
Removing odours

1. Sprinkle boot insides with baking soda and leave overnight. In the morning, vacuum out baking soda.
2. Some retailers also sell a spray to freshen the boots' insides and reduce odour.

Consider replacing your inners

The wool inside your uggs will compress over time, but that doesn't mean you have to ditch them. Some boots have interchangeable inner soles so you can swap out the existing sole for a fluffy new one. You can buy new soles online for less than \$20 and they're compatible with most brands that have an interchangeable sole. ■

GRACE SMITH





Hot picks for cold days

Winter is here and staying warm is now the name of the game.

Margaret Rafferty shares the must-have items to get you through the season

Surviving the winter chill in Australia is no joke – many of our homes simply aren't well-suited for withstanding the cold due to their draughty design or lack of insulation. But aside from the obvious (a heater or reverse-cycle air con), there are a few simple products that can keep you feeling warm and cozy throughout the cooler months.

You might already be across these essentials, but maybe you'll find something that's missing from your winter arsenal.



1 The electric blanket

We're lucky in Australia that most of us enjoy relatively mild winters, but the nights can still get seriously cold in many parts of the country.

Apart from adding an extra blanket or heavier doona to the bed, one thing that many of the CHOICE team say they enjoy is an electric blanket.

Electric blankets are great for warming up your bed on a chilly night. They're also cheap to run, especially when compared to an electric heater.

Electric blankets are cheaper to run than an electric heater

Modern electric blankets are safe, but there's always a small risk. We advise not to use it overnight, and it definitely shouldn't be used by young children. If the cord or controls look damaged, stop using it straight away. If you have a pacemaker, check with your health professional before using.

Turn to page 51 for our latest review of this winter essential. ▶





2 Heated throws

Heated throws are like the younger, hipper sibling of the electric blanket. Unlike their fuddy-duddy older brother who stays on the bed and only gets used at night, a heated throw is dynamic. It can move around with you, bringing warmth wherever you are in the house.

With many of us working remotely, more than one CHOICE team member praised a heated throw as an essential part of their home office set-up.

“A heated blanket for working from home in winter changed my life! It’s cheap and super toasty and I literally let out an audible ‘ahhhh’ whenever I put it back on after being out of my chair,” one fan tells us.

We included some heated throws in our latest test of electric blankets – see page 51. Being an electrical item, you should take care when buying and using them. Check recalls on the ACCC’s Product Safety website and follow the manufacturer’s recommendations for their safe use.

3 The slow cooker

One of the best things about cooler weather is the chance to enjoy hearty winter meals. Prepping dinner in the slow cooker before you head into the office and returning at the end of the day to the smell of a delicious meal ready to eat is one of the highlights of wintertime.

As well as being delicious, meals cooked in a slow cooker can be good for your wallet, too. Slow cooking is a

great way to turn cheaper cuts of meat into a succulent and sustaining dish. And they don’t have to cost you much – models as cheap as \$29 earn a recommendation in our review (see page 44).

Slow cookers aren’t just good for meaty casseroles and stews. They’re also great for cooking lentils and other pulses and are ideal for hearty stocks and soups.



4 Dutch ovens

While slow cookers are cheap, safe, easy and efficient, many will argue that the flavour you’ll get from food cooked in a Dutch oven is superior. That’s the opinion of CHOICE audience and engagement editor Pru Engel, who conducted her own comparison of slow cookers and Dutch ovens.

“My cast-iron Dutch oven undeniably produces a superior flavour compared to my slow cooker and has become my go-to for slow cooking when I know I’ll be home,” says Engel. “Cosy, winter weekend afternoons at home are even more special when the house is filled with the aroma of some lamb shanks or beef stew cooking in the oven.”

CHOICE home economist Fiona Mair has been testing slow cookers



and Dutch ovens in our test kitchen for decades. While she thinks both cooking methods have their place, she agrees the Dutch oven wins on flavour.

“Both can give excellent results, but dishes will generally taste better when cooked in a Dutch oven,” says Mair. “That’s because of the ability of a cast-iron pot to retain heat more effectively and maintain consistent, even temperature that allows flavours to concentrate and develop, and enables that rich caramelisation.”

Unlike a slow cooker, which will take care of itself if you need to be out of the house, a Dutch oven can’t be left unattended on a stovetop. We’ll bring you the latest Dutch ovens review in our August issue.

5 The stick blender

While perhaps not as obvious an inclusion, a stick blender receives a nomination on our list of winter must-haves because it’s great for making soup. And unlike a traditional blender, you can use a stick blender to smooth out your soup in the cooking vessel, meaning less washing up.



Of course, stick blenders are handy for all sorts of things, from blending up a smoothie to making pesto, but their ability to turn roasted vegies and stock into a smooth, tasty soup makes them very popular at CHOICE HQ.

When testing stick blenders our experts look for products that are good at processing and chopping, easy to handle and easy to clean. The good news is that this is another appliance category where you don't have to pay a fortune to get a good-performing model.



6 Heated towel racks and bathroom warmers

Not surprisingly, there were several nominations for appliances specifically designed to keep you warm in the bathroom. After all, who doesn't want to reduce the shock of shivering on the tiles after leaving a lovely warm shower?

Heated towel rails were a popular option. "We had a plug-in heated towel rack on wheels. Highly recommend it," says one devotee.

The heat light is another popular option for keeping bathrooms warm. Though not strictly an appliance, those who had them sang their praises.

Also in this category, though less common, is underfloor heating. "When we redid our bathroom the contractor suggested underfloor heating. So nice when you have bare feet," says another CHOICE staff member.



7 Humidifiers and dehumidifiers

Depending on the weather or where in Australia you live, winter can bring with it either irritating dry air that causes allergies to flare, or dampness that causes mould.

Dry air can irritate the skin, nose and throat, or create problems for people with allergies or respiratory problems. In this case, a humidifier might help.

Of course, air that's too damp brings another set of problems. The cold, wet, damp air that's a feature of some regions can make our homes uncomfortable, encourage the growth of mould and dust mites, and even cause damage to paintwork. In those situations a dehumidifier can be useful. We recommend choosing a desiccant dehumidifier if you're planning to use it in a cool climate. When reviewing dehumidifiers, our testers look for the models that are best at increasing humidity and are easy to use and energy-efficient. See page 55 for their picks.



Who doesn't want to reduce the shock of shivering on the tiles after leaving a lovely warm shower?



8 Ugg boots

Our hands and feet are two

of the most important body parts when it comes to thermoregulation.

This means that if your hands and feet are warm, it's going to help your whole body feel toasty too.

While wearing gloves inside all day is probably more hassle than it's worth,

it's easy to keep your feet warm with a humble pair of uggs. Synthetic slippers may be significantly cheaper, but we think it's worth paying that little bit extra for a pair of genuine uggs that will last the test of time. Their natural fibres allow air to circulate so the skin can breathe, which means your feet won't sweat and give you smelly slippers.

If you do invest, looking after them properly is key to getting the best value out of your new sheepskin slippers. Turn to page 28 to read our guide to caring for and cleaning your uggs. ■



Cashed out

Residents of Tennant Creek and surrounding remote towns have been left with severely limited access to cash after a sudden bank closure. **Jarni Blakkarly** reports

It's a Thursday morning outside the office of CatholicCare Northern Territory in Tennant Creek, an unassuming building just off the main highway that splits the town in two.

For many of the financial assistance charity's clients, it's payday. That means there is a steady stream of people coming in to ask for help to access their online banking or reset their pin numbers so they can go to one of the only remaining ATMs in town and withdraw cash.

When asked what they are coming in to get help with, everyone gives the same one-word answer, "Westpac".

The town is the main regional hub for the wider Barkly region – an area bigger than New Zealand

It has been over two years since Australia's second-largest bank closed its branch and pulled out of the town of Tennant Creek with less than 24 hours' notice. Support workers like regional manager Marcella Rankine were left scrambling.

"There was no notice. We just got a Westpac worker come in and say we were closing and that was it and it was closed the very next day," Rankine says.

"The community was lost and confused about where to get their Westpac money from, so we stepped in and provided the service, but the impact was huge. We had to stop delivering other services."

Westpac found to have breached the Code

Tennant Creek is a hot and remote town, 500km north of Alice Springs on the long stretch of the Stuart Highway to Darwin. It was once bustling due to the extensive mining operations, and at one point was one of the biggest gold-producing regions in Australia. Now, more than half the shopfronts on the main street are boarded up.

On the outskirts of town, the Battery Hill Gold Mining and Heritage Centre displays relics of the town's former glory days, such as old mining tools, alongside black and white photos of men working among the rocks and dirt. There is almost no mention of the fact that, for thousands of years, this has been Warumunga country.

The town is home to 3000 people, more than half of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and it is the main regional hub for the wider 320,000km² Barkly region, an area bigger than New Zealand.

People come into town here from all across the region to access services. The Westpac closure has had a major ripple effect. There's now just one bank branch left in Tennant Creek – ANZ – and it opens for just four hours a day, Monday to Friday.

When the Westpac branch pulled out of town, CatholicCare lodged a complaint with the Banking Code Compliance Committee, a committee of just three people supposed to ensure banks comply with the voluntary industry Code of Practice.

It found that Westpac breached the Code with its abrupt branch closure, but the sanction issued by the committee was mild at best: Westpac was merely named in a scathing press release. The bank has faced no other consequences for leaving marginalised customers in the lurch.

"Westpac could have done at least six months' preparation to let the community know this is happening," Rankine says.

"They could have built the capacity of the community before their closure with the internet banking and the telephone stuff, but it wasn't that way, it was all lumped on us to do."

Over two years on from the closure, CatholicCare still spends much of its limited resources assisting Westpac customers. In the month of November 2024 alone, they recorded 161 Westpac clients coming in for support.



Westpac says that "safety and security concerns" in Tennant Creek meant it needed to close the branch outside standard process in order to "protect our people".

"These circumstances were specific to the Tennant Creek branch and included damage to our branch and ATM. Customers were notified via SMS and informed of alternative banking options. We recognise more could've been done to fully support our customers, and we have reviewed and strengthened our branch closure protocols as a result," a spokesperson says.

Westpac did not respond to our questions about whether the bank, which posted a \$7 billion profit in 2024, would consider providing financial support to charity organisations doing

the work of assisting Westpac's customers. The spokesperson says Westpac continues to provide services to Tennant Creek through engagement team visits, including one as recently as February 2025.

A community reliant on cash

Westpac's closure in Tennant Creek was a case study in how a regional bank branch shouldn't treat its customers. But it was also just another example of a nationwide problem that's only getting worse.

As more and more regional and remote bank branches close, residents in these towns and the surrounding communities are having trouble accessing cash. For many, it's still their primary form of payment. First Nations advocates say their communities are particularly reliant on cash, which remains the preferred way of doing business. ►

Two years on, CatholicCare still spends much of its limited resources assisting Westpac customers



CatholicCare's Marcella Rankine says the impact of the branch closure has been huge.



“I can do this online stuff, but for a lot of the mob from out country it’s a struggle”

For many elderly First Nations customers, cash is the only way they have ever known, and financial counsellors say forcing people to move to internet banking is excluding them from vital services, as well as exposing them to potential financial abuse.

“For our mob here, they lose their key cards a lot, some of them forget their pin numbers, so to have cash for First Nations is very important,” Rankine says. “It’s easy for them to track their money... it’s really important for our mob to get their cash out so they have it.”

Vulnerable to exploitation

Hans, a man in his forties, pulls up to the CatholicCare office in a beat-up ute. Marvin, an elderly man who speaks little English, sits alongside him. He has come from a remote community further north. He doesn’t

have a bank card or remember his online banking password and Hans is helping him get his money out of the bank.

Marvin goes into the office, and, with the help of CatholicCare staff, his money is transferred into Hans’s account so they can then go to the ATM on the main street and withdraw it before heading to the IGA to buy food.

Hans explains to me that he has to transfer his own money into another account, so it doesn’t get mixed up with the money being transferred in by Marvin.

“I can do this online stuff, but for a lot of the mob from out country it’s a struggle,” he says. “From the whitefella perspective they think electronic is the way, but it ain’t so easy out here.”

While Hans helpfully assists Marvin, Rankine says the situation of older people needing to transfer money

to younger people puts them in a potentially vulnerable situation.

“They transfer their money to another family member’s account, which sometimes gets lost in that transaction and the old people don’t get their money. That’s one thing that happens, we have noticed. It leaves it open to misuse and people stealing their money,” she says.

Nearest branch now 500km away

At Barkly Regional Arts, a group of elderly women sit around a big table or on mats on the floor, painting works of art. For Mary James, who comes almost every day, it is a therapeutic practice she has enjoyed for years, and it also earns her a little money.

The 64-year-old former Westpac customer says for over a year after the bank closed she would do a 10-hour round trip on a Greyhound bus to Alice Springs on an almost weekly basis to get to the nearest branch just to do her banking.

"I don't trust online banking, because there are so many scammers online in this day and age," she says. She has since reluctantly changed banks and closed her Westpac account.

Boandik woman Bettina Cooper, senior financial counsellor at Mob Strong Debt Help, says that, along with the issues around trust, transferring all banking services to online or phone banking makes things more difficult for many First Nations communities around the country.

"People go into the towns and collect cash as a form of safety and to make sure that they can still pay for their essentials, because they don't always trust that the technology is going to work," she says.

Cooper says the dwindling number of ATMs in many remote areas and problems with keeping them operational is another issue. In Tennant Creek, for example, there are just a handful of ATMs in town and CHOICE was told that

they are often non-operational due to damage or running out of cash.

"When there is no ATM, or the ATM is out of cash, or when there is no bank, it often leads to people having to revert back to communal money, where they're borrowing money from family, and it places additional pressure on the larger First Nations family and community," Cooper says.

"It's not helpful to building financial independence and financial literacy."

Only one other bank left in town

Bunuba woman Martina Kingi from the Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network in Far North Queensland says the lack of digital access in many of the communities she works in highlights the need for in-person banking services.

"The Telstra outages, the power outages, it's pretty difficult to use

any kind of digital payments or ATMs when they are down," she says.

Kingi urges the banks that are still servicing remote First Nations communities to think about their social responsibility to their customers before closing.

In February 2025, the Australian Banking Association (ABA) announced an undertaking from all

of the "big four" banks that would guarantee no more remote bank branch closures until at least July 2027. While that has provided some immediate relief, there are concerns for what the future holds after that date. CHOICE head of policy

Morgan Campbell says that government intervention may be needed to make sure banks don't go cashless at certain branches or reduce hours significantly during the moratorium. "Ensuring customers retain 'reasonable access to cash' may require improving access to cash in areas of the country," adds Campbell.

The ABA also announced an extension of banking services at post offices in remote areas. But a range of consumer organisations say that post office staff are not properly trained or equipped to serve banking customers, and while Bank@Post is better than no service at all, it is not a proper solution.

ANZ says it is committed to supporting the needs of Tennant Creek customers with everyday banking services and its branch office was refurbished in April 2024.

Rankine says she has to keep up hope that ANZ won't close here as so much of the town is now reliant on the one bank.

"I don't want ANZ to close, because then we are done, we got nothing," she says. ■

"I don't want ANZ to close, because then we are done, we got nothing"



After Westpac closed, Mary James would do a 10-hour round bus trip to visit a bank branch.

Consumer champion



First Nations financial counsellor Lynda Edwards has been working in the sector for 25 years. **Jarni Blakkarly** reports on the need for more like her to help Close the Gap

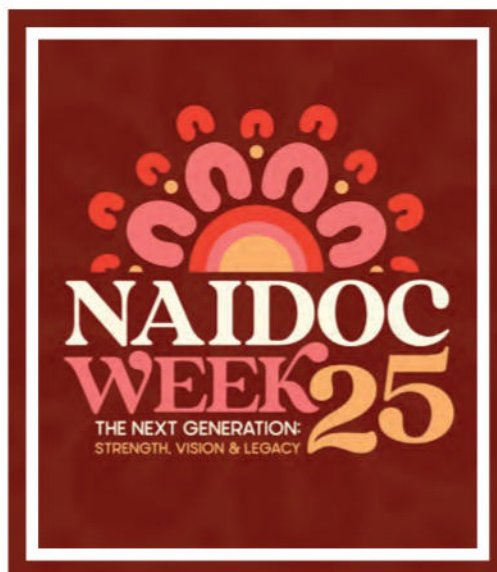
Lynda Edwards has seen the financial literacy and community sector grow and change in immeasurable ways during her time as a First Nations financial counsellor. She chatted with CHOICE from her home in Narromine, near Dubbo in New South Wales, ahead of NAIDOC Week, 6–13 July. She reflected on her experiences, and how the sector has evolved to put

First Nations voices in charge of the conversation around their own financial needs.

“When I started the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Financial Literacy Network in around 2006, we held our first meeting and it was a room of non-Indigenous people at the front talking about us, and all us mob quietly up the back,” she says.

“I was actually, like, ‘No, we need to get a lot of these people out of the room.’”

“The idea that there is one rule for all customers ... shows no cultural competency or understanding”



“Sometimes it needs to just be us mob in the room.”

Lynda was born in Bourke, NSW and is Wangkumara on her father’s side and Barkindji on her mother’s. Her family moved around NSW a lot and she finished her HSC at an Aboriginal hostel in Newcastle.

Lynda became a mother in her early 20s and worked for the NSW Police Force as one of the first Aboriginal liaison officers, before relocating her family to Narromine and taking up a job as an administrative clerk for the local council.

She left the council around a decade later and landed a job helping people in financial hardship – something she says she was already doing for friends and family before making it a career.

“Assisting people with bills, helping them with budgets – it’s something I was already doing, though of course it is different when you make it a job,” she says.

“At that time, there were not very many First Nations people within this sector and there were certainly not a lot of conversations around First Nations financial hardship or even financial literacy.”

Lynda says the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Financial Literacy Network was a foundation on which to build understanding in the sector about the unique financial situations facing First Nations communities, and the different approaches needed to address them.

“When we started meeting together as a national group, we realised that there are just so many things that are just so wrong, in terms of how financial services engage First Nations people. There were policies and processes that just really didn’t fit,” she says.



One rule doesn’t work

“The idea that there is one rule for all customers, and all are the same, shows no cultural competency or understanding. We know that it can’t work because you have people that are extremely disadvantaged, extremely vulnerable, that have been excluded from financial systems since colonisation,” she adds.

Lynda joined Financial Counselling Australia (FCA) full time in 2017 and says leading its work around the country on First Nations issues has been incredibly rewarding.

But, while she has seen some positive change in the attitudes of the financial services industry and relations with First Nations customers, she says other changes have been slow to arrive.

“Some services are trying – and trying to do well – while for others it is a box-ticking exercise,” she says.

Call for peak body

Lynda adds that there has been a groundswell of financial counsellors from First Nations backgrounds taking on the profession around the country and she hopes to see the trend continue.

“Now, in 2025, we have around 40 qualified First Nations financial counsellors and another 40 or so financial capability workers. It is very good to see,” she says.

“My dream is for us to have our own peak body for First Nations financial literacy in this country. I think we need it.” Lynda says financial

literacy is key to many of the government’s Closing the Gap targets and something that needs to be embedded and invested in around the country.

“Every other area that you have feeds into financial literacy. When you think about health, when you think about education, money plays an important role in access to those things, too.” ■

“My dream is for us to have our own peak body for First Nations financial literacy in this country”



Damage control

Is your household more accident-prone than most? **Jane Bardell** and **Daniel Graham** help you decide if it's worth adding accidental damage cover to your insurance policy

Accidental damage insurance provides cover for sudden and unforeseen damage to your property that wasn't caused on purpose. It's designed for accidents and mishaps like red wine spills on the carpet, scorching a benchtop with a too-hot pot, or accidentally knocking a hole in the wall when moving furniture.

You might consider adding accidental damage cover to your home insurance policy if you have accident-prone children or boisterous pets, and furniture or electronics that are costly to repair or replace. But if you're after cover for specific items or events, make sure you read the PDS to confirm you'll be covered for what you need.

How does accidental damage cover work?

Accidental damage cover is not included as standard in basic home insurance policies. It's usually an optional extra that you can add to your policy for an additional fee.

Sometimes when insurers offer different tiers of policies, accidental damage may be included in the top-tier policy, along with other inclusions that you may or may not need. If you need to claim, it works like any other insured event. You pay your nominated excess, and the insurer covers the rest – up to the sum insured or sub-limit that applies.

NEED TO KNOW

- Accidental damage is an insured event covered by some home and contents insurance policies, usually as an optional extra.
- It covers mishaps that result in damage to your home or its contents.
- There are lots of exclusions associated with this cover so make sure you read the fine print.

It's usually an optional extra that you can add to your policy for an additional fee

How much does it cost?

The cost to add this extra cover to your home insurance policy depends on a number of factors. If you have combined home and contents insurance, it will typically add between 4% and 10% to the cost of your policy. If you have only contents insurance, the mark-up is usually 15% to 31%.

Your location will also play a role. The mark-up is typically lower in Queensland and the Northern Territory, where base premiums are usually higher than in the rest of the country.

We found that the cheapest policies for accidental damage cover are usually the ones that offer it as an optional extra, rather than the top-shelf products that include it by default. ▶

How we compare prices

We conducted a price analysis of the policies in our home insurance comparison that offer accidental damage cover. We compare the total premium, factoring in the mark-ups where accidental damage is an optional extra. We take this approach rather than looking at percentage mark-ups alone to account for insurers that may have a low percentage mark-up for accidental damage but a high premium to begin with, and in order to compare with products that include accidental damage cover as default.

We use quotes for combined home and contents insurance and contents-only insurance. Quotes were collected as near as possible to a \$1000 excess for up to 5530

combined home and contents scenarios, and 7280 contents-only scenarios. Scenarios are market-representative and reflect real-world addresses and insurance purchasing trends. For policies with optional accidental damage cover, quotes were collected without the optional extra, and adjustments were made to account for the additional premium.

Each quote was assigned a score, with the most expensive quote in each scenario scoring 0 and the cheapest scoring 100. These individual quote scores were then used to calculate an average score for each product. The products listed below left had the highest average scores.

Cheapest home and contents policies for accidental damage



Australia Post



AAMI Home and Contents



NRMA Home Buildings and Contents Standard



QBE



Westpac*



Allianz

* Identical policy available for the same price through BankSA, Bank of Melbourne and St.George.

Cheapest contents-only policies for accidental damage



AAMI Home Contents



GIO Classic



RACV



Suncorp Classic
Suncorp Classic Extras



TIO

Suncorp Classic Extras includes accidental damage cover as standard; for all the other policies it's an optional extra.



What does it cover?

As with any insurance purchase, it's important to read the PDS before you buy to understand what's included and what's not. This is particularly important with accidental damage insurance because of the variation in cover both between policies, and within the policy – in terms of what's covered for accidental damage compared with what's covered for the other insured events.

The lists of common inclusions and exclusions below give an idea of what may or may not be covered for accident damage.

COMMON INCLUSIONS

On top of the comprehensive cover for accidents, some policies cover things in their accidental damage option that are explicitly excluded in other sections of the policy. For example:

- **Fire:** Some policies cover damage caused by ash, heat, soot or smoke where there is no flame damage present. Similarly, some policies cover charring or melting caused by items that generate heat or smoke, like space heaters and cigarettes.
- **Animal damage:** Some policies only cover animal impact damage.
- **Motor burnout (in a fridge or air conditioner, for example):** While most policies offer this as a separate optional extra (or cover it by default), some bundle it with accidental damage cover.
- **Power surge:** While typically covered if caused by lightning strike, some accidental damage policies cover power surge regardless of the cause.

Note that these are just some examples – for every policy that has these inclusions, you will find one that excludes it. And because accidental damage is so broad, you're more likely to see a list of exclusions rather than inclusions, leaving you to read between the lines to figure out whether you are covered.



COMMON EXCLUSIONS

Damage that occurs over time is excluded from accidental damage cover. The examples generally given are wear and tear, fading, or earth movement. Damage must usually be the result of a single, identifiable cause.

Other common exclusions from accidental damage cover include:

- certain items while in use such as bicycles, fishing gear, musical instruments or firearms
- certain items while being handled, such as china or glassware
- damage to retaining walls
- damage to pontoons, jetties and boat moorings
- loss caused by computer malfunctions or viruses
- anything in the policy's "General Exclusions" section. Sometimes the policy's accidental damage section will be quite short, because all the exclusions apply to the entire policy rather than this one event.

Jewellery, watches and mobile phones are also sometimes excluded. Small items may be better covered by portable contents cover.

How is it different to accidental breakage?

Accidental breakage is an insured event that is covered by default in standard home insurance policies. It covers things made of glass (and sometimes other breakable materials like ceramic or fibreglass). Cover is usually limited to things like mirrors, baths and cooktops. Accidental damage cover, on the other hand, applies to a much wider range of items.

What if I want cover away from home?

Some insurers include accidental damage cover for items such as laptop, musical instrument or sporting equipment when you're away from home. But typically for cover outside the home, you're better off with separate portable contents cover. It has some overlap with accidental damage cover, in that your portable items are covered for accidental loss and damage at home as well as away. However, it does usually come with sublimits and a more restrictive list of items that can be covered. Few insurers cover the whole list of general contents away from home under their premium policies.

Damage that occurs over time is excluded from accidental damage cover

How to save money on home insurance

With the current cost of living what it is, Australian households are looking for ways to cut down their everyday bills. Just like with your health insurance and utility bills, there are some simple things you can do to cut the cost of your home insurance. Here's where to start.

1 Shop around

If you've been with the same insurer for more than 24 months, CHOICE insurance expert Daniel Graham advises calling your insurer and asking if you can get a better deal.

Then, get quotes from at least three other insurers to compare and find the best value. Some insurers will match or beat competitors' premiums, and new customers often get a discount to sweeten the deal.

To help identify which insurers you should call, check the table on page 43. We've compared more than 50 different policies from across the market to help you find the right cover for your building and contents, with a focus on accidental damage cover. And, unlike other insurance comparison companies, CHOICE is completely independent and we don't get paid by any of the insurers we're comparing.

When getting quotes, also consider the level of cover you need. If you've made any changes to your home or your circumstances have changed, it may be worth adjusting your coverage. ►

Some insurers will match or beat competitors' premiums

How much can you save?

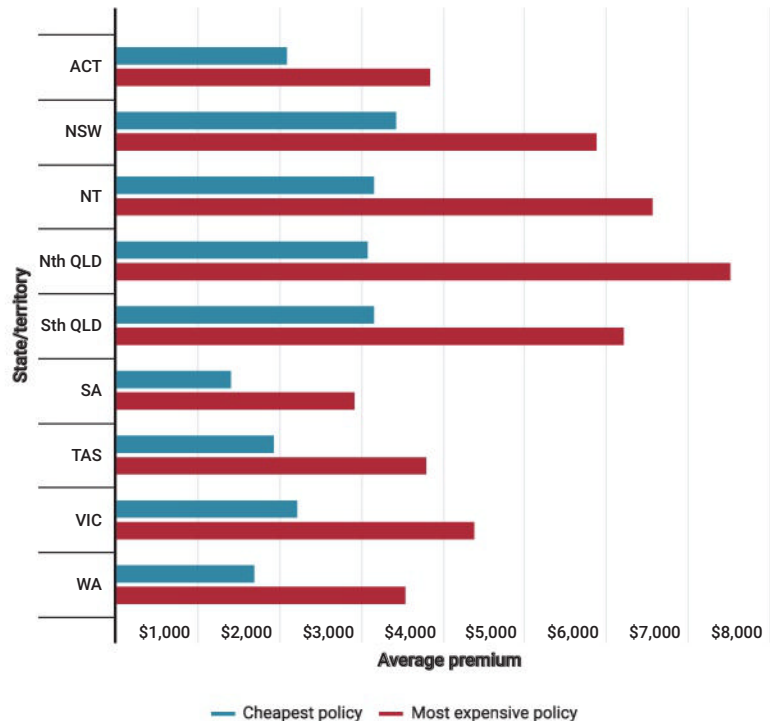
Shopping around can save you thousands of dollars. The difference in average premiums between the cheapest and most expensive policy ranges from \$4429 in North Queensland to \$1504 in South Australia.

In all states, average premiums for the most expensive policy are around double the average premiums for the cheapest, so there are a lot of savings to be found.



How much is home insurance?

Cheapest and most expensive average premium



Average premiums based on a market-representative sample of 159,177 quotes for building and contents insurance collected in April 2025. Quotes for a wide variety of customer profiles were obtained with as near as possible to \$1000 excess. We calculated the average premium for all policies; premiums shown are for the policies with the lowest and most expensive average quote across all scenarios in a state or territory. Queensland is divided into north and south along the Tropic of Capricorn.



2 Consider a higher excess

The excess is the amount you need to pay towards a claim before your insurer will cover the rest. A higher excess can result in lower premiums, as it may mean you make fewer claims overall.

For example, if you have an excess of \$500 on your policy, this is the amount you have to pay when making a claim.

With a \$500 excess, it makes sense for you to make a \$1500 claim. But if you increase your excess to \$1500, you would only make claims that are higher than that amount to make it worth your while. The insurer therefore charges you less, as you're likely to make fewer lower-value claims.

"Generally speaking, your premium goes down around 10% for every \$500 increase to your excess," says Graham.

"Having an excess of between \$1000 and \$1500 seems to be where you can get the best savings. We've found there are diminishing benefits to increasing your excess much above that.

"Some insurers offer very high excesses around the \$5000 mark or higher, but those levels seem to be there for people who live in places at high risk of natural disaster, where home insurance is already very expensive and people need to bring down their premiums any way they can."

3 Avoid the loyalty penalty

New customers often get cheaper premiums than renewing customers, as insurers offer discounts to attract new customers while keeping customers who have been with them for years on the same rate.

"We call this the loyalty penalty," says Graham. "It simply means that if you haven't switched insurers for a while, you're likely missing out on savings. If you're willing to put in the effort you could theoretically change your insurer every year or so to keep getting the first year discount."

Simply check your renewal price against your current insurer's online quote calculator. If the price is lower for a new customer, call and ask them to match the lower price.

4 Look for discounts

Many insurers offer discounts for things such as installing security systems, having a good claims history, or if you're working from home a lot. Bundling your home insurance with other insurance, such as your car insurance, for example, can also reward you with a discount.

But make sure you read the details of the policies carefully.

"Make sure the policies will suit your needs – you don't want to get discounted home and contents cover

just to end up with a dud car insurance policy," says Graham.

5 Consider paying yearly

You can also get a discount by paying your premiums annually instead of monthly.

"Some insurers charge you more to pay by the month, which means you could be paying 10–25% extra each year. Some insurers charge a flat fee for paying monthly, although most simply tack on a percentage of your premium as the penalty," says Graham.

In any case, if you currently pay monthly but could afford to pay a whole year's worth of insurance in advance, call your insurer to ask what the difference in cost would be.

THE INSURERS WHO DON'T CHARGE YOU EXTRA FOR PAYING MONTHLY

Allianz	Hume Bank
ANZ	NAB
Apia	National Seniors
Bank of Melbourne	People's Choice
BankSA	RAA
CBA	RAC
CGU	St. George
Great Southern Bank	Sure
Honey	Westpac

If you can't afford to pay upfront, look for an insurer that doesn't charge fees for paying by the month.

6 Take out one of our recommended policies

The policies our experts recommend have superior cover, and they're often cheaper than average policies. When we compare home and contents insurance we look at what cover a policy provides and how much it costs on average in a state or territory.

The best policies are recommended by our experts and they're the ones you should start with when shopping around. Consider the level of cover you need, then check our review to find the best value policies that meet your requirements.



Recommended		Underwriter	PERFORMANCE				ACCIDENTAL DAMAGE COVER				
			CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Cover score (%)	Price score (%)	Accidental damage price score (%)	Included in policy	Mobile phones	Bicycles	Drones	Sporting equipment
✓	Australia Post Home	QBE	75	75	76	79	O	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
✓	QBE Home	QBE	74	75	74	77	O	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
✓	NRMA Home Plus	IAG	72	74	68	71	✓	✓	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
	CBA Home and Contents	Hollard	69	69	69	61	O		✓ (F)	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
	NRMA Home Standard	IAG	69	62	80	77	O	✓	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
	RACT Home and Contents	RACT	68	55	86	71	O		✓ (F)		✓ (F)
	GIO Classic	Suncorp	67	62	75	67	O	✓	✓	✓	✓ (F)
	Kogan Home	QBE	67	75	54	56	O	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
	TIO Territory Home	Allianz	67	68	65	68	O	✓	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
	Apia Home and Contents	Suncorp	66	56	81	na	(B)	na	na	na	na
	AAMI Complete Replacement Cover	Suncorp	65	64	67	62	O	✓	✓	✓	✓ (F)
	Bank of Melbourne Home and Contents	Allianz	65	56	77	75	O	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
	BankSA Home and Contents	Allianz	65	56	77	75	O	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
	RACV Home Buildings and Contents	IAG	65	58	76	72	O	✓	✓		✓ (F)
	St. George Home	Allianz	65	56	77	75	O	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
	Westpac Home	Allianz	65	56	77	75	O	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
	AAMI Home and Contents	Suncorp	64	53	81	78	O	✓	✓	✓	✓ (F)
	Allianz Home and Contents	Allianz	64	56	75	75	O	✓	✓		✓ (F)
	Suncorp Classic	Suncorp	64	62	66	61	O	✓	✓	✓	✓ (F)
	Sure Home & Contents	(A)	64	58	72	71	O	✓	✓	✓	✓
	GIO Classic Extras	Suncorp	63	71	52	62	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ (F)
	RACQ Household	RACQ	62	57	69	68	O	O (E)			
	Suncorp Classic Extras	Suncorp	62	70	49	61	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ (F)
	Suncorp Classic Advantages	Suncorp	61	74	41	52	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ (F)
	RAC Building, Contents And Personal Valuables	RAC	60	56	66	65	O (C)	✓	✓		✓ (F)
	Aldi Household	RACQ	59	56	64	55	O	O (E)			
	Great Southern Bank Home and Contents	Allianz	58	56	61	59	O	✓	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
	Hume Bank Home and Contents	Allianz	58	56	61	59	O	✓	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
	CGU Accidental Damage	IAG	57	65	43	43	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ (F)
	CGU Listed Events	IAG	57	57	56	na		na	na	na	na
	Guild Home Essential	Guild	57	59	54	na		na	na	na	na
	NAB Home and Contents	Allianz	55	56	54	51	O	✓	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
	National Seniors Home and Contents	Allianz	55	56	54	51	O	✓	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)
	Honey Household	RACQ	54	56	51	41	O	O (E)			
	Real Insurance Top	Hollard	54	54	54	64	✓	✓	✓		✓
	GIO Platinum	Suncorp	53	75	20	29	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ (F)
	People's Choice Accidental Damage	IAG	53	65	35	36	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ (F)
	People's Choice Listed Events	IAG	53	57	46	na		na	na	na	na
	Everyday Insurance Comprehensive	Hollard	52	54	49	59	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Guild Home Elite	Guild	52	66	31	31	✓	✓	✓ (F)		✓ (F)
	AHM Comprehensive	Hollard	51	51	52	61	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Huddle Comprehensive	Hollard	51	51	52	62	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Real Insurance Essential	Hollard	51	45	61	na		na	na	na	na
	RAA Home and Contents	RAA	50	61	35	25	O (D)	✓	✓	✓ (F)	✓ (F)

TABLE NOTES Recommended

We recommend policies with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 70%. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of cover (60%) and price (40%). **Cover score** is calculated from a comparison of 43 policy features. **Price score** is calculated from a comparison of up to 5330 quotes per policy, or 164,266 quotes in total, collected in April 2025. **Accidental damage price score** is calculated using the same pricing set, taking into account the additional cost of optional accidental damage cover. Only policies that offer accidental damage were compared for this score. This score does not contribute to the CHOICE Expert Rating. For all scores, higher is better. A high cover score means the policy tends to have higher sublimits and fewer cover restrictions. A higher price score means the policy tended to be cheaper, on average. For space we have omitted policies with a CHOICE Expert Rating less than 50%, and policies for which we don't have price data. **Accidental damage cover: Mobile phones, Drones, Bicycles and Sporting equipment** Indicates whether the policy provides cover for the listed item under the accidental damage cover. Cover under other events may be different. Sublimits may apply for individual items. **(A)** Liberty Mutual, Pacific International, New India Assurance and Chubb. **(B)** Covered under Apia's premium policy, Home Extra. That policy is not available online, so we can't compare it on price and have omitted it from this comparison. **(C)** Only available for contents. **(D)** Only available for contents, up to \$5000 overall. **(E)** Accidental damage cover for phones available as a separate optional extra. **(F)** Not covered while being used. For more product feature details and state-specific price ratings, visit choice.com.au/homeinsurance. ■



One-pot wonders

Are you getting the most out of your slow cooker?

Pru Engel and **Fiona Mair** want to make sure you avoid these mistakes

Loved for its ability to deliver hearty, warming, home-cooked meals with minimal fuss, the slow cooker is a true hero of the winter kitchen.

With many of us trying to cut back on costs, it's also a handy helper when it comes to creating cheaper dinners that go further and make the most of great-value ingredients.

But are you getting the best out of this clever kitchen appliance, or is your slow-cooker game falling flat? CHOICE home economist and serious slow-cooker fan Fiona Mair knows all the common slow-cooking mistakes that people sometimes make. We take you through them so you can follow her advice to ensure you turn out delicious meals with minimal effort, every time.

Searing and caramelising your meat allows those vibrant slow-cooked flavours to develop

1. Not searing your meat

For maximum flavour, never skip the searing. Searing and caramelising your meat allows those vibrant slow-cooked flavours to develop. Some slow cookers have a sear function that means you can sear directly in the cooking bowl, so all of the flavours and meat juices are retained for added flavour (while also reducing the need for extra pans and washing up).

If your cooker doesn't have this function though, it's worth getting the frypan out. For bonus points, coat your meat in seasoned flour before searing to help thicken the sauce during cooking.

2. Using the wrong cut of meat

Put the pricey sirloin away! The most expensive cuts of meat are wasted

on slow cookers, so we're giving you an excuse to be tight on the budget. Cheaper, fattier cuts of meat such as stewing beef, chuck steak or blade are perfect for slow cooking, because long cooking times keeps them moist and flavourful in stews, curries, soups and casseroles.

Leaner meats such as chicken breast can get tough when cooked for a long time, so are best avoided. Instead, go for bone-in chicken thighs or chicken pieces cut from a whole bird.

3. Overcooking your dishes

While we encourage you to 'set and forget' while slow-cooking, it is possible to overcook your dishes, especially if you're using the high setting (which will take 5–6 hours, as opposed to the low setting which will usually take about 8 hours).

Follow your recipe guidelines and switch your slow cooker off or to the 'keep warm' setting once it's done. If you are a tad forgetful,

choose a model with a timer that will switch to the 'keep warm' setting automatically (which is also handy if you're not sure when you'll be home from the shops).

4. Being an impatient cook

It may be tempting to remove the lid and take a good look at how your stew is stewing, but be patient!

"Lifting the lid too much will cause the cooker to lose heat and it takes a while to get it back," says Mair. "It's best to check if your food is done towards the end rather than throughout. Each time you lift the lid to check the food or skim the fat, you should add an extra 10 minutes to the cooking time."

Many models have glass lids for the curious cooks who like to see how their dish is progressing.

5. Spending too much on a slow cooker

As we often find in our CHOICE testing, more expensive appliances aren't always the best, and the same goes for slow cookers. We've found some great budget buys below \$50 that our testers score just as well, if not better, than models costing \$100–200 more.

More expensive slow cookers tend to have more fancy features, but these may not be important to you, so work out which features you'll use before you decide which model to buy.

6. Not adding the right amount of liquid

Slow cookers are a form of moist-heat cooking and there is minimal evaporation during the cooking process, so it's important that you add enough liquid for the food to cook in. Not enough liquid and your food will become dry or be undercooked; too much and the flavour will be diluted and you might end up with a soup when you were trying to make a stew.

"When you slow-cook meat or vegetables, the water content of these foods adds to the cooking liquid, so keep that in mind when adding liquid. You should add less than you normally would if cooking on a cooktop, unless you are making a soup," Mair says.

"If you're boiling meats, such as corned beef, make sure to add just enough water to cover it so it doesn't dry out."

If you do find that there is too much liquid in your casserole or stew, you can thicken the sauce with cornflour. Mix one tablespoon in a little cold water and stir it in, cover and cook for a further 10 minutes on the high setting.

7. Not defrosting your meat properly

This pretty much goes for any time you are cooking meat, but you should always ensure it is defrosted properly. If not, your meat will likely not cook properly and this could double your cooking time and dilute the flavour of your sauce. The best and safest way to defrost meat is by placing it in the refrigerator overnight, then cooking within 24 hours.

8. Overfilling your slow cooker

Filling the slow cooker bowl over the maximum capacity can cause the liquid to bubble up around the lid and splash onto your bench, especially when using the high setting. Putting too many ingredients in will also result in uneven cooking. Always follow the recipe and ensure your slow cooker is large enough.

9. Buying the wrong size slow cooker

Choosing a slow cooker with the right capacity for your needs is important.

If you're cooking for two, you'll only need a 3–4.5L slow cooker, but if you're cooking for more people or would like to have leftovers, look at a 5–8L model.

Keep in mind that some models can be very large and heavy, which could mean they're tricky to clean or store. Check our ease of use scores, which give you an idea of how easy each model is to store, clean and assemble.

10. Not making room for leftovers

One of the big perks of slow cooking is not only the lovely aromas it gives your kitchen, but the amazing potential for leftovers! As slow-cooked dishes are usually quite tender and saucy, they are perfect for freezing, which means you can take care of multiple meals at once and build up a great stash of dinners ready to be defrosted. ►

One of the big perks of slow-cooking is not only the lovely aromas but the potential for leftovers!





What to look for

BENCH SPACE AND STORAGE

Consider how much food you anticipate cooking for you and your family, the cupboard space required for storage, and bench space for usage. Round slow cookers tend to waste space. Rectangular cookers generally use space more efficiently when in storage.

INDICATOR LIGHTS

Look for bright indicator lights and a control switch that's easy to access and is clearly labelled.

TIMER

A timer is handy as it counts down the time on your slow cooker and then alerts you when cooking is finished. Don't confuse this with a delayed-start timer, which you can set to turn on or off while you're away. Use such a feature with caution – leaving food in the cooker at a warm-ish temperature will breed bacteria. If you find your slow cooker turns off prematurely, you should throw the food out – it's not worth risking food poisoning.

AUTOMATIC SETTING

This setting is handy as it starts the process on high to bring the food up to temperature and then switches to

a low temperature for the remaining cooking time.

SEARING

Searing meat before slow cooking allows caramelisation to occur and therefore more flavour to develop. There are models on the market that are able to sear meat and vegies, either in the slow cooker itself or by transferring a removable inner pot to the cooktop. This removes the need for multiple pans (and extra washing up) when cooking meals that require searing.

CLEANING

There should be few or no cracks or crevices for food to get trapped, and each part should be easy to clean. A stainless steel exterior may show fingerprints and need more wiping. Large cooking bowls can be awkward to clean in the sink or fit in the dishwasher.

ACCESSIBILITY

People with mobility issues should look for a cooker that's not too big and is easy to handle – a huge bowl may be heavy or not fit into a small sink. It should have clear instructions and large, well-labelled controls at the front that are easy to operate.

How we test

Our home economist Fiona Mair gives slow cookers a thorough workout by conducting two main cooking tests to assess their performance:

• Corned beef on low setting:

We use standard-sized pieces of corned silverside to check each slow cooker's ability to cook a dish at a low temperature over an extended period of time (eight hours).

• Chilli shredded beef (with dried beans) on high setting:

This test establishes how well each slow cooker can cook a dish at high temperatures over a shorter time (six hours) without food sticking to the bottom of the pot.

Mair awards scores for texture and appearance, with deductions for dark or dried-out areas, overcooked texture or chilli shredded beef sticking to the pot.

She also assesses ease of use, including how easy the cookers are to assemble, clean and store, and records the external temperature of the cooker surface, handles and controls during operation.

Recommended		COSTS			PERFORMANCE				SPECIFICATIONS								
		Price (\$)	Running cost/year cooking on low (\$)	Running cost/year cooking on high (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Cooking performance score – low setting (%)	Cooking performance score – high setting (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Searing function	Auto setting	Timer	Cooking bowl type	Cooking bowl suitable for dishwasher / fridge	Shape	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Claimed capacity (L)	Weight (kg)
SMALL CAPACITY (UP TO 5L)																	
✓	Kmart Anko 3L Slow Cooker a	29	66	75	86	85	100	75				C	✓/–	R	27 x 27 x 24	3	3.5
✓	Breville The Multi Chef BRC600	170	43	47	84	85	80	77	✓			N	–/✓	R	26 x 32 x 28	3.7	3
	Crock-Pot Digital Hinged Lid One Pot Cooker CHP550	80	74	52	76	80	70	77			✓	C	✓/✓	R	22 x 35 x 31	4.7	4.7
	Russell Hobbs Slow Cooker 4443BSS	50	45	44	68	60	65	77		✓		C	✓/✓	O	22 x 34 x 25	3.5	3.5
LARGE CAPACITY (5.5L+)																	
✓	Breville The Smart Temp BSC420BSS	150	100	78	89	100	100	73			✓	C	✓/✓	O	27 x 45 x 29	6	6
✓	Sunbeam SecretChef Slow Cooker HP5520	70	103	87	85	100	90	70				C	✓/✓	O	20 x 45 x 29	5.5	5.9
✓	Russell Hobbs Searing Slow Cooker RHSC650	100	67	49	83	100	70	80	✓		✓	N	–/✓	O	25 x 39 x 26	6	2.9
✓	Russell Hobbs 7L Slow Cooker RHSC7	80	102	101	81	80	100	67				C	✓/✓	O	25 x 45 x 30	7	6
✓	Russell Hobbs Easy Clean Multi-Cooker RHMC20	130	84	109	81	100	80	67	✓			N	✓/–	O	24 x 47 x 29	6	3.2
✓	Kmart Anko 6.5L Digital Slow Cooker 42671732 KY-502T	47	119	103	80	100	70	72			✓	C	✓/✓	O	26 x 41 x 29	6.5	5.6
	Breville Searing Slow Cooker LSC650BSS	239	95	48	79	80	80	77	✓		✓	N	–/–	RE	26 x 44 x 28	6	5.9
	Laura Ashley 6.5L Slow Cooker LASC65CR (VQ-650W-CR-AUS)	170	110	87	79	75	90	72				C	✓/✓	O	26 x 42 x 31	6.5	5.8
	Russell Hobbs RHSC600	80	79	77	75	80	75	70		✓		C	–/–	O	24 x 41 x 30	6	5.6
	Westinghouse Slow Cooker 6.5L WHSC08KS	85	108	107	73	60	90	70				C	ns	O	25 x 43 x 30	6.5	5.5
	Contempo Slow Cooker 5.5L XK-13220C0	24	99	96	72	60	90	68				C	✓/✓	O	26 x 42 x 30	5.5	5
	DeLonghi Electric Slow Cooker Pot CKS1660D	219	71	63	67	65	60	73	✓ (A)		✓	N	–/✓	O	25 x 46 x 30	5.7	4.2
	Russell Hobbs SatisFry Air Fry & Grill Multicooker RHMCAF40	300	105	67	67	50	75	72	✓		✓	N	✓/–	S	28 x 31 x 38	5.5	5.7

TABLE NOTES **Recommended** We recommend slow cookers with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 80%. **Price** Recommended retail as of May 2025. **Running cost per year on low** Based on low-temperature cooking for eight hours per day, three days a week at 40c/kWh over a year. **Running cost per year on high** Based on high temperature cooking for six hours per day, three days a week at 40c/kWh over a year. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of cooking performance – low setting (30%), cooking performance – high setting (30%), and ease of use (40%). **Cooking bowl type** C Ceramic, N Non-stick. **Shape** R Round, O Oval, RE Rectangle, S Square. **(A)** On stove. **ns** Not stated. All models have a keep warm function or automatically switch to keep warm except for Russell Hobbs Slow Cooker 4443BSS. The Anko products are also now available from Target. ■

Shop Ethical rating

BRAND	RATING
Breville	C
Crock-Pot	F
DeLonghi	C
Kmart Anko	C
Russell Hobbs	C
Sunbeam	F
Westinghouse	C

NOTE: Other brands in our review not mentioned here don't have a Shop Ethical rating. For more on Shop Ethical ratings and what they mean, see p73.





Attachment theory

Which food processor attachments do you really need?

Margaret Rafferty gets the inside info from our kitchen expert



Winter is the perfect time to bust out the food processor – along with the myriad attachments it may come with. Slicing blades will make short work of cutting up ingredients for soups and stews; you can use the chipper blade for tasty and healthy chips from seasonal root veggies, and you could even make fresh orange juice or prepare dough for crusty hot bread.

“Food processors are a great appliance to own if you want to make things from scratch,” says CHOICE home economist Fiona Mair. “They can chop, dice, slice, shred, grate and mix doughs – they can be used in so many ways.”

“Food processors are a great appliance to own if you want to make things from scratch”

But a food processor can be a significant investment, with the most expensive models in our latest test costing over a thousand dollars, so before you fork out for one, you should understand what the different attachments do. If you’re not going to use all the attachments, you might be happier with a cheaper food processor with fewer add-ons.

Your basic model will come with a processing blade, a grater (coarse or fine), a slicer, and often a dough blade. But that’s only the start. Some have a blender attachment (large or small), a mini bowl, a chipper blade for making chips and vegetable sticks, and even a citrus juicer.

Of course, your cooking style and preferences will determine how

useful any particular attachment will be. But Mair offers these insights on the attachments she thinks are the must-haves, and those that are unlikely to see the light of day.

The must-have attachments

PROCESSING BLADE



According to Mair, there are only a couple of attachments that will be essential for most home cooks.

“The processing blade is probably the most useful attachment you can have,” she says.

This comes with every food processor, and it’s what you’ll use to dice, chop and blend ingredients. You can also use it to blitz leftover bread into breadcrumbs, whip up mayonnaise and dressings and puree soft fruit and vegetables.

SHREDDING AND SLICING BLADES



Mair also rates the shredding and slicing blades, which are useful for preparing vegetables for things like coleslaw. Available in coarse or fine, you can also use them for shredding or slicing cheese, onions, fruit such as apples and pears, and frozen meat for soups.

Alternatively, some food processors come with adjustable blades that allow you to change the way they slice, which means you can make short work of slicing veggies to whatever thickness you want. You may find this feature useful to save having to buy – and store – separate attachments.

Attachments that can be useful

CHIPPING BLADE



A chipping blade is another potentially useful attachment that you can use to slice potatoes, sweet potatoes and other hard root veggies.

“Not all processors come with one, but if you’re making a lot of chips it can definitely be useful,” says Mair.

Check the manufacturer’s product details if you’re looking for a model with a chipping blade. As mentioned, some food processors come with an adjustable blade that could also be used for chipping.

BLENDER ATTACHMENT



Food processors that come with blender attachments are becoming more common.

“We are seeing more and more food processors with blender

attachments in the form of a jug

or a single-serve cup,” says Mair. “These attachments are handy as they allow you to blend liquids like smoothies or soups (which food processors can’t).”

But can a blender attachment replace a stand-alone blender? Not really, according to Mair.

“While they can be useful, they may not be high-powered enough to make things like nut butters and sorbets,” she warns.

JUICER ATTACHMENT



A citrus juicer attachment might be handy if you make a lot of fresh orange juice, but often they don’t work as well as an actual juicer.

“If you don’t juice a lot, you don’t need it,” says Mair. “If you do juice

a lot, a dedicated juicing machine might be a better option.”

If you’re sure you want a model that offers a juicer attachment, check the manufacturer’s product details as part of your research.

The least useful attachment

DOUGH BLADE



Our home economist nominates the dough blade – a small, usually plastic blade, similar in shape

to the essential processing blade – as the attachment most of us could do without.

“Most of them don’t seem to work very well. Just use the processing blade instead,” she says. ▶

Storage for attachments

The versatility of a food processor with all the attachments can be costly – not just in dollars, but also in terms of the amount of kitchen real estate they’ll consume.

“Some of the models we tested will take up a lot of space, particularly once you include the attachments,” warns CHOICE home economist Fiona Mair.

With all the extra attachments, you’ll want to think about storage. Some models come with boxes or caddies in which to store these accessories.

“Breville’s The Paradise 9 Food Processor has a caddy that fits into the bowl, which makes storage easy and doesn’t take up too much cupboard space,” says Mair.

On the other hand, some of the food processors we tested from Braun, Russell Hobbs, Duraprès and Kenwood didn’t come with any storage for their many accessories.



			Performance				Specifications												
Recommended		Price (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise (dba)	Double feed chute	Fine slicing blade	Course slicing blade	Fine shredding blade	Coarse shredding blade	Fine grating/zesting blade	Mini bowls	Blender attachment	Size of bowl	Claimed maximum bowl capacity (mL)	Wattage (W)	Weight (kg)	Warranty (yr)
✓	Magimix CS 5200XL	1099	85	92	75	72	✓ (A)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		L	3600	1100	8.3	3 (C)
✓	Breville The Paradise 9 BFP638BTR	549	84	88	77	76	✓ (B)	✓	✓	✓	✓				M	2250	605	5.4	2 (C)
✓	Breville The Kitchen Wizz® 9 BFP610BSS2IAN1	449	83	88	75	76	✓ (B)	✓	✓	✓	✓				M	2250	605	5.8	2 (C)
✓	Magimix 3200XL	799	82	88	72	71	✓ (B)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		M / S	2600	650	7.2	3 (D)
✓	Magimix 3180XL	699	82	88	72	71	✓ (B)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		M / S	2600	650	6.9	3 (D)
✓	Breville The Paradise 16 BFP838BSS2IAN1	899	81	86	73	78	✓ (B)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		L / S	4000	900	9.4	3 (C)
✓	Magimix Premium 5200XL	1399	81	88	70	77	✓ (B)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		L	3600	1100	8.4	3 (C)
	Kenwood MultiPro Express White FDP65740WH	219	80	88	67	82	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	M	3000	1000	2.8	5
	KitchenAid 13 Cup Food Processor 5KFP1319ABM	449	80	88	68	70	✓ (B)	✓	✓	✓	✓				L	3100	400	4.7	2
	KitchenAid 7 Cup Food Processor 5KFP0719 AAC Cream	269	78	84	68	75	✓	✓	✓		✓				M	1700	250	3.1	2
	Ninja Professional Food Processor BN650ANZ	150	78	80	75	75			✓		✓				M	2100	850	3.4	1
	KitchenAid 9 Cup Food Processor KFP0921AOB	319	77	82	70	72	✓ (B)		✓		✓				M	2100	250	3.4	2
	Breville The Wizz & Store LFP460GRY	150	76	82	68	89	✓ (B)	✓		✓	✓				M	2000	700	3.8	1
	Kenwood MultiPro Express FDP65.890SI	239	76	82	67	78	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	M	3000	1000	2.8	5
	Kenwood MultiPro XL Weigh+ FDM72.910BK	399	76	82	68	79	✓ (B)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	M	3000	1000	4.1	5
	Braun PureEase Food Processor FP 3131 WH	159	75	80	68	81		✓		✓				✓	S	2100	800	2.2	1
	Kmart Anko Food Processor FP403	79	75	83	63	81	✓ (A)	✓	✓	✓	✓				M	2000	700	3.6	1
	Sunbeam Multi Food Processor Plus LCP6000BK	199	75	84	62	86	✓ (B)	✓		✓				✓	M	2000	600	3.6	1
	Kenwood MultiPro OneTouch Blender & Food Processor FDM73.480SS	399	72	79	62	79	✓	✓		✓				✓	M	3000	1000	3.7	5
	Kmart Anko 1.2L Food Processor FP9053KB-GS	52	72	76	67	83			✓		✓				S	1200	500	2.1	1
	Duraprès Prep Master Pro Food Processor DP800	279	71	79	60	76	✓ (B)	✓	✓	✓	✓				L	3500	1300	3.7	2
	Russell Hobbs Desire Matte Charcoal Food Processor RHFP2711	120	66	68	63	84		✓		✓				✓	M	2300	600	2.4	2

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend food processors with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 80% and an ease of use score of at least 70%. **Price** Recommended retail price as of May 2025. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is based on performance (60%) and ease of use (40%). **Performance score** is based on results for slicing a hard vegetable, crumbing, shredding a firm food, making shortcrust pastry and emulsifying. **Size of bowl** This is based on the usable bowl capacity **L** Large (2501mL and larger), **M** Medium (1501–2000mL), **S** Small (under 1500mL). **Noise** Measured when crumbing bread, using the highest speed setting (where applicable). **Maximum bowl capacity** is the capacity of largest supplied bowl. **(A)** Three chutes. **(B)** With a chute lock. **(C)** 30 years on motor. **(D)** 3 years parts and labour and 30 year motor guarantee. All models have a processing blade and dough blade.

Shop Ethical rating

NOTE: Other brands in our review not mentioned here don't have a Shop Ethical rating. For more on Shop Ethical ratings and what they mean, see p73. ■

BRAND	RATING
Braun	C
Breville	C
Kenwood	C
KitchenAid	D
Kmart	C
Ninja	C
Russell Hobbs	C
Sunbeam	F

Snug as a bug

A heated throw by day and electric blanket at night can give you low-cost warmth all winter, says **Rebecca Ciaramidaro**



When temperatures drop, thoughts turn to hot drinks, woollen socks, and a heated throw to keep you warm on the lounge or an electric blanket to ready your bed for a warm and cosy night's sleep.

Heated throws are a fairly new item that we've only recently tested for the first time. You might be wondering how they differ from an electric blanket – and if it's worth getting one of each.

An electric blanket is used on your bed and typically placed under the bottom sheet. The blanket uses electricity to heat up and keep your bed feeling cosy and warm.

A heated throw also uses electricity for warming, but is more portable, so it's useful throughout the day. Whether you're working from home or relaxing on the couch, you can wrap yourself in the throw or drape it across your lap to keep warm. Simply connect it to your wall power socket, get comfortable, and wait to feel nice and warm. The throws we tested are quick to heat up: most were able to reach 40°C in under five minutes, and the slowest took 12 minutes.

Stay warm for less

A heated throw will generally cost you less to buy than an electric heater.

The heaters we tested range in price from \$69 to \$749, while the heated throws range in price from \$35 (the Anko heated throw available from Kmart and Target) to \$199 (Sunbeam Feel Perfect Heated Throw Blanket).

Heated throws are also cheaper to run. And because they're portable and can be used where you are, this makes them a cost-effective way to get and stay warm without having to heat the whole room or house. ►

A heated throw will generally cost you less to buy than an electric heater

If you use a heated throw to keep you warm while you work or relax at home, and then slip into bed and stay warm with an electric blanket at night, you've got yourself a cost-effective 24-hour heating solution.

The heated throws we tested will cost you only \$12 to \$18 to run all season, even if used frequently. While we measure running costs for electric blankets differently, the models we tested can cost you up to \$50 for the whole winter if you were to use one on low for eight hours each night.

By comparison, when we tested electric heaters and measured their running costs, we calculated they can cost you anywhere from \$195 to \$491 in electricity to run throughout the winter season.

Safety

Our testing showed that heated throws are safe, and the models we reviewed passed our durability tests too. However, there's always a risk when electricity is involved, and accidents can happen.

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for use, don't plug the heated throw into a power board or extension cord, don't let young children use them, and don't let your pets chew or claw them.

If you find any issues with the electrical cord, controls, or wiring in the blanket, stop using it immediately.



If your feet tend to get cold, look for an electric blanket with extra warm foot zone controls

What to look for AUTO-OFF FEATURE

This feature automatically turns off the electric blanket or heated throw after a pre-set amount of time.

EASE OF FITTING

For electric blankets, a fitted blanket with elastic all around is easier to put on and take off, and stays flat and taut on the mattress. Models that tie down or have elasticated straps are more fiddly to use.

FOOT ZONE

If your feet tend to get cold, look for an electric blanket with extra warm foot zone controls, or check that the heating elements extend as far to the foot of the blanket as possible.

RAISED MARKINGS OR LIGHTS

Raised markings or illuminated levels on the controls are useful for seeing or changing settings in the dark.

COMFORT

For an electric blanket, assess how thick the material is and how much the heating elements stick out if you lie on them. Some can also be uncomfortable if you lie where the controller plugs into the element.

DUAL CONTROLS

These are generally available on queen- and king-sized electric blankets to let you control the temperature on your side of the bed independently (which is handy for couples with different preferences).

PROGRAMMABLE SETTINGS

Many electric blankets and heated throws have timers (for one, three or five hours, for example). Some may even have a smartphone apps that let you set a maximum heat setting

at a particular time, for example.

They may even work with smart home hubs like Alexa or Google so you can turn your blanket on or off with a voice command.

MATERIAL

Much of an electric blanket or heated throw's cost comes down to its composition. A woollen fleece electric blanket gives extra comfort and will cost more than a thin mattress topper. Some are waterproof, quilted or have anti-bacterial claims.

WASHABLE

Many electric blankets and heated throws can be put in your washing machine on a delicates cycle (once the controllers are removed), but check manufacturer instructions first. Some have a removable cover, which makes it easier to clean. Most need to be line-dried, but some are suitable for tumble-drying on a cold setting (consult the manual for your specific model to make sure).

CORD LENGTH

If you're using a heated throw, check to make sure the electric cord is within reach of a power point, so you can use it on your lounge without being restricted. Don't plug it into an extension cord as this can cause overheating and is a potential fire risk.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY COMPLIANCE

All electric blankets must display a regulatory compliance mark (a tick inside a triangle) confirming that it is approved for safe use in Australia, which includes requirements such as ensuring the blanket won't get dangerously hot.



BRAND	RATING
Breville	C
Dimplex	B
Kambrook	C
Kmart Anko	C
Sunbeam	F

NOTE: Other brands in our review not mentioned here don't have a Shop Ethical rating. For more on Shop Ethical ratings and what they mean, see p73.

Heated throw vs hot water bottle

Hot water bottles are a cheap way to warm up in winter. You can pick one up with a plush cover from places like Kmart for as little as \$10. But do they work? And how do they compare to a heated throw blanket?

Cost: A hot water bottle is cheap to buy, and other than the tiny cost of the hot water used to fill it, doesn't cost anything to run.

Heating: Hot water bottles heat up immediately after you add the hot water, whereas you'll have to wait a few minutes for a heated throw. However, heated throws have setting controls to adjust the heat and offer continuous heating, whereas a hot water bottle will gradually lose heat.

We tested a hot water bottle alongside the heated throws. After adding water at roughly 50°C, the surface temperature of the hot water bottle was about 30°C. After two hours the surface temperature was 27°C.

Portability: A heated throw is portable – as long as there's a power point nearby. But you can take a hot water bottle anywhere.

Ease of use: Heated throws can be time consuming to clean but are relatively easy to use – simply plug in and select the heat setting. On the other hand, hot water bottles can be tricky to fill. You should not use boiling water in a hot water bottle, but the water will still be very hot. Care needs to be taken to avoid spills and burns. If you're using a cover, it'll need to be on the bottle when it's being filled, which means it may get wet in the process. ▶



HEATED TROWS		COSTS		PERFORMANCE		SPECIFICATIONS													
Recommended		Price (\$)	Winter running costs (\$)*	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Performance score (%)	Temperature at lowest level (°C)		Time taken to reach 40°C (min)		Max. temperature achieved (°C)		Machine washable	Number of heat levels		Timer settings**	Cord length (m)	Measured dimensions (cm, W x L)	Warranty (yr)
✓	Sunbeam Feel Perfect Heated Throw Blanket TRF4300	199	14	88	81	90	28	2	45	✓	6	✓	4	120 x 160	3				
	Dimplex DreamEasy Heated Throw DHEBHTCG SS09	99	18	86	75	90	29	3	48		9	✓	2.7	128 x 180	2				
	Jason Plush Heated Throw TSK160x130-1SC / AHTJTSK1C	79	14	86	75	90	29	3	50	✓	9		2.6	127 x 167	2				
	Breville The Ultra Luxe Heated Throw LHT339CHR	120	12	86	76	90	27	2	52	✓	6	✓	2.5	143 x 170	3				
	Kmart Anko Heated Throw Grey TK140X110-1S	35	13	77	73	70	31	12	40		9	✓	3.1	115 x 138	1				

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend heated throw blankets with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 85% and at least 80% for ease of use. **Price** Recommended retail as of May 2025. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of performance (40%), durability (20%) and ease of use (40%). * Based on a 92-day period for winter with the blanket on its lowest setting for three hours and maximum setting for three hours each day, calculated at 40c/kWh. As some heat fluctuations may occur, this is the maximum cost. ** Specific timer options vary depending on model. All blankets are made in China and passed our durability tests. All have removable controllers, auto-off feature and illuminated heat levels. None of the models we tested have raised markings on the controls.

IMAGES: GETTY

Electric Blankets		Costs		Performance		Specifications											
Recommended		Price (\$)	Winter running costs (\$*)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Performance score (%)	Lowest temperature at all-night use (°C)	Max. temperature achieved (°C)	Time taken to reach 40°C (min)	Recommended pre-heat time (min)	Number of heat levels	All-night setting**	Auto-off	Extra warm foot zone	Raised markings	Timer settings***	Warranty (yr)
✓	Breville BodyZone Antibacterial BZB437WHT	279	18	86	75	90	29	41	4	ns	6	✓	✓	(B)		✓	3
✓	Breville The Sleep Sound Fitted Electric Blanket LEB439WHT	200	37	86	75	90	32	52	3	ns	9	✓	✓	✓		✓	3
✓	Breville The Sleep Sound Quilted Fitted Electric Blanket with Quilted Cover LEB539WHT	269	38	86	75	90	27	52	3	ns	9	✓	✓			✓	3
✓	Sunbeam Sleep Express Electric Blanket BLE4851	169	23	86	75	90	30	54	2	ns	6	✓	✓			✓	3
✓	Sunbeam Sleep Perfect Antibacterial Electric Blanket BLA6351	199	48	86	75	90	39	53	2	ns	6	✓	✓			✓	3
✓	Sunbeam Sleep Perfect Quilted Electric Blanket BLQ6451	279	44	86	75	90	38	54	2	ns	6	✓	✓			✓	3
✓	Sunbeam Sleep Perfect Wool Fleece Electric Blanket BLW6651	469	48	86	75	90	38	53	2	ns	6	✓	✓			✓	3
	Tontine Soft & Cosy Electric Blanket with Sherpa Fleece Top Layer for Extra Softness & Warmth TEB2035QB	109	11	84	71	90	30	46	4	30	3	✓					2
	Dreammaker Fully Fitted Bamboo Quilted Electric Blanket TH203x152-2XC/9009831	200	14	83	68	90	32	47	4	30–60	3	✓					ns
	Kmart Anko Electric Heated Topper TT-1101X	79	12	82	74	80	29	43	8	60	3	✓	✓				1
	Bambi Moodmaker Electric Blanket Fleecy Cover	309	13	80	69	80	28	45	6	60	10	✓	✓			✓	3
	Bambury Standard Electric Blanket SEBQ	180	14	80	61	90	30	45	4	60–120	3	✓			✓		2
	Giselle Bedding Heating Blanket EB-POLY-MC-Q	93	17	80	71	80	30	47	6	60–120	3	✓			✓		ns
	Tontine Luxe Luxuriously Warm 2-in-1 Heated Topper with Removable Cotton Cover Comfort Layer THT2031QB	299	6	80	69	80	27	43	6	30	9	✓	✓	(B)		✓	3
	Bedra Underlay Electric Blanket EBK-UND-FLEE-Q (TDK203x152-2XC)	96	8	79	68	80	26	44	8	30–60	9	✓	✓			✓	ns
	Dimplex DreamEasy Electric Blanket DHEBPQ	99	12	79	78	70	29	43	9	15	3	✓	✓		✓		2
	Heller Queen Fitted Electric Blanket HEBQF2	99	14	79	68	80	30	47	5	30–60	3	✓					1
	Onkaparinga Electric Blanket Cotton Quilted TH203x152-2XC / CEBOTH2C	170	14	79	68	80	32	46	5	30	3	✓					2
	Tontine Multi-Zone Electric Blanket TEB2056QB	200	2	79	78	70	26	42	11	30–60	9		✓	(B)		✓	3
	Jason Luxury Fully Fitted Electric Blanket TH203x152-2XC / CEBJTH2C	170	14	78	65	80	29	44	6	30	3	✓					2
	Linen House Microfleece Electric Blanket QB LHB3004	280	6	77	73	70	26	42	10	ns	9	✓	✓	(B)		✓	2
	Soren Fully Fitted Electric Blanket	180	8	75	67	70	28	43	10	30–60	9	✓	✓			✓	2
	Kambrook Dream Weaver KEB435WHT	130	12	74	64	70	29	43	9	ns	3	✓					3
	Linenhouse Wool Multi-zone Electric Blanket QB LHB1004	450	10	74	74	60	27 (A)	41	15 (A)	ns	9	✓	✓	(C)		✓	2
	Kmart Anko Fitted Electric Blanket TT-1101XQ	55	13	74	66	70	29	42	11	60	3	✓	✓				1
	Bambi Moodmaker Electric Blanket Cotton Cover	219	9	73	62	70	29	42	12	60	10	✓	✓			✓	3
	Bambury Premium Electric Blanket SPEBQ/BPEBQ	350	8	70	74	50	27 (A)	41	20 (A)	60–120	9	✓	✓	(B)		✓	2
	Elysian Multizone Fitted Heated Blanket	230	6	69	73	50	25	40	18	30	9	✓	✓	(C)		✓	2

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend electric blankets with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 85%. Note that while we feature queen-sized blankets, results should be similar for single- and king-sized variations of the same brand. **Price** Recommended retail as of May 2025. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of performance (40%), durability (20%) and ease of use (40%)*. * Based on a 92-day period for winter with the blanket on its lowest setting for eight hours after pre-heating, calculated at 40c/kWh. As some heat fluctuations may occur, this is the maximum cost. If a blanket doesn't have an all-night use setting it will cost significantly less and we won't include this in the calculation. ** We don't recommend leaving blankets on all night. *** Specific timer options vary depending on model. (A) Because this is a fluffy/thick blanket, the temperature of the elements is taken on the underside of the blanket for a more accurate reading. Surface temperature of blanket topside would feel lower. (B) No, but allows foot zone to have a different heat setting. (C) Yes and also allows foot zone to have a separate heat setting. ns Not stated. All blankets made in China and passed our durability tests. All can be machine-washed except Kmart Anko models, which are handwash only. All have removable controllers. All models have illuminated heat levels, except Tontine Soft & Cosy, Bambury Standard, Jason Luxury and Kambrook Dream Weaver models. ■



Spore no more

For damp, musty homes or those affected by floods or leaks, **Amy Potter** and **Pru Engel** explain why a dehumidifier could be your saving grace

Humidity in your home is a Goldilocks situation. Too little, and dry skin and irritated airways might be on the cards; too much, and your home could be a breeding ground for mould and dust mites, which can trigger asthma and other health problems.

And if your home is rife with condensation or has suffered a leak or water damage, it can eventually lead to mould, flaking paintwork and further damage to your property.

If the humidity in your home tends to the high side, it's important to take steps to achieve the right levels. To help you find that 'just right' balance, here's everything you need to know about dehumidifiers.

What does a dehumidifier do?

Dehumidifiers remove moisture from the air, helping prevent mould. They mostly work by drawing air in, then

filtering and cooling it to condense moisture. It's then reheated before warmer and dryer air is released.

"Dehumidifiers are a good option if you have persistent humidity or dampness problems, or if your home has been affected by a flood or leak and you're trying to dry it out," says CHOICE household expert Chris Barnes. "They're also useful when renovations to improve airflow aren't possible."

Do you need a dehumidifier?

It depends on your home's humidity levels. The National Asthma Council Australia advises the humidity in your home should be between 30% and 50%. A hygrometer, which measures relative humidity, could be worth buying.

If your home doesn't have good airflow, it may already be showing signs of damp and high humidity:

a musty odour, condensation on windows, or mould. Whether it's worth forking out for a dehumidifier depends on how big your damp problem is and how big your budget is. ▶

Signs of damp and high humidity include a musty odour, condensation on windows, or mould

NEED TO KNOW

- Dehumidifiers are a good option if you have persistent damp problems, or if your home has been affected by a flood or leak.
- They can also be beneficial when drying laundry indoors, as they help reduce condensation and the likelihood of mould developing.
- Consider noise, size and weight to help you choose the right model for the right room.

“They can make a big difference to a persistently damp home and may save you from costly repairs or health problems in the long run,” says Barnes.

How much do they cost?

Dehumidifiers can cost from around \$100 to more than \$1800. In our latest review, the average price of models recommended by CHOICE experts is \$580. You’ll also want to consider ongoing expenses like running costs. Models can range from one cent to 22c an hour to run, so aim for a balance between operating costs and effectiveness.

Broadly speaking, cheaper models have fewer features and a smaller tank, which often means they might not be as efficient at water removal. Pricier models typically have higher energy efficiency, more features and a larger tank. That said, they’ll usually be larger, heavier and often noisier.

“Dehumidifiers can be expensive to buy, and noisy to run,” says Barnes. “They’ll also add to your electricity bill, as they can use a fair bit of power, which will add up if you have to run them for long periods of time.”

Types of dehumidifier

There are two main dehumidifier types: refrigerant and desiccant.

REFRIGERANT DEHUMIDIFIERS

Refrigerant models use the same technology as a fridge.

“They draw in air, cool it to condense the water it contains, then warm it and blow it back out,” explains Barnes.

“It’s easier for them to cool the air if it’s already warm, so they work best in moderate or warmer climates. However, the released warmer air might be undesirable in hot climates.”

Refrigerant models tested in our dehumidifier product reviews were more energy-efficient than desiccant models, had larger tanks and better water removal. But they were also larger, heavier and noisier.

DESSICANT DEHUMIDIFIERS

“These models use a slowly rotating disc or belt of material that absorbs moisture from the air,” says Barnes. “The damp section then moves through a drying process, which evaporates the water and collects it in a tank.”

Desiccant models tend to perform similarly no matter what the air temperature is, so can be better in cooler climates, where a refrigerant model may struggle. But in a warm or hot climate “a refrigerant will usually outperform a desiccant”, says Barnes.

The desiccants we tested typically had a higher running cost and smaller tanks, but tended to be lighter, more compact and more portable.

Are dehumidifiers good for drying clothes?

A dehumidifier can be used to help your clothes dry faster. It can also reduce mould and dust that can result from drying your laundry indoors. Over half the models in our latest dehumidifier review have a specific laundry setting for this purpose. They’re no match for tumble dryers, but they’re still a great option if you don’t have outdoor drying space, especially during colder months.



Will a dehumidifier help after a flood?

A dehumidifier can certainly help after a flood or a water leak in your home. It won’t pump water out, but it will help remove water from the air, to keep the humidity down to a comfortable level.

If your home furnishings have been soaked by floodwater, then running a dehumidifier will help dry them out faster, but any carpet or furniture that’s been badly water damaged will probably be beyond the powers of the dehumidifier to help.

You’ll want a model with a large water collection tank, since it will be pulling a lot of water from the air (be prepared to empty the tank often), or one with continuous drainage (a drainage hose connected to empty straight into a drain). You may need to run the dehumidifier for several days, so check our reviews to find one that’s effective but doesn’t cost too much to run. They can also be a bit noisy, but that might be the least of your worries after a flood.

If you’ve escaped flooding, but your home is damp inside from wet weather, a dehumidifier on low can protect your furnishings from damp and mould and make the air more comfortable.

Shop Ethical rating

BRAND	RATING	NOTE: Other brands in our review not mentioned here don’t have a Shop Ethical rating. For more on Shop Ethical ratings and what they mean, see p73.
Breville	C	
DeLonghi	C	
Dimplex	B	
Kogan	D	
Mitsubishi	F	
Olimpia Splendid	B	
Philips	C	



Recommended		COSTS			PERFORMANCE						SPECIFICATIONS												
		Price (\$)	Running cost per hour (\$)	Power cost to remove 10L of water (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Water removal score (%)	Water removal claims score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise (dBA)	Type	Timer	Humidistat	Laundry mode	Air filter	Wheels or castors	Carry handle	Power consumption (W)	Weight (kg)	Measured tank capacity to switch-off (L)	Claimed water removal rate (L/day)	Fan speeds	Maximum recommended room size (m ²)
✓	Ausclimate AU1910DD	500	0.28	7.23	89	100	94	79	81	51	D	✓	✓	✓	✓		1	706	7	2.72	10	2	50
✓	Ionmax ION630	549	0.29	7.67	88	100	94	77	81	54	D	✓	✓	✓	✓		1	749	7	4.31	10	2	42
✓	Ionmax ION632	549	0.28	7.55	83	96	88	77	68	60	D	✓	✓	✓	✓		1	689	8	3.46	10	1	50
✓	Ionmax ION612	459	0.23	8.00	82	77	99	76	80	53	D	✓	✓	✓	✓		1	580	6	1.85	7	2	30
✓	DeLonghi DD230P	799	0.15	2.91	81	100	40	95	75	55	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	359	17	6.28	30	2	63
✓	Ausclimate WDH-070EBP	730	0.23	3.48	79	100	31	93	72	60	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	566	21	6.56	50	2	105
✓	Dimplex GDDE50E	599	0.21	3.08	79	100	28	95	73	54	R	✓	✓		✓	✓	2	533	20	6.08	60	3	60
✓	Ionmax Rhine ION650	649	0.16	3.84	77	100	19	92	76	53	R	✓	✓	✓		✓	2	388	17	4.99	50	2	260 (A)
✓	Mitsubishi Electric MJ-EV38HR-A	1299	0.09	2.57	77	95	23	97	75	52	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	232	18	5.53	38	2	ns
✓	DeLonghi Tascuigo AriaDry DEXD216RF	549	0.07	2.62	75	75	43	96	73	48	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	186	10	2.3	16	2	75 (A)
✓	Ionmax ION610	429	0.17	7.72	75	60	91	77	77	48	D	✓	✓	✓	✓		1	441	5	1.72	6	2	25
✓	Ausclimate NWT WDH-930DA	600	0.16	4.59	73	89	23	89	75	53	R	✓	✓		✓	✓	2	387	13	4.85	35	2	50
✓	DeLonghi DDSX220WF-WH	699	0.11	3.76	73	78	34	92	75	52	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	279	14	4.73	21	3	90 (A)
✓	DeLonghi Tascuigo AriaDry DEXD214RF	449	0.08	2.95	73	69	45	95	73	48	R	✓	✓	✓	✓		1	192	10	2.33	14	2	65 (A)
✓	Ionmax Leone ION625	449	0.07	2.27	72	76	28	98	72	47	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	163	15	3.92	25	2	95 (A)
✓	Ausclimate WDH-316DB	450	0.08	3.03	71	67	38	95	72	44	R	✓	✓	✓	✓		1	193	10	2	16	2	25
	Dimplex DC12DE	400	0.06	2.86	68	55	42	95	74	50	R	✓	✓	ns		✓	1	150	10	1.57	12	2	ns
	Ausclimate WDH-1920EA	550	0.09	3.71	67	66	24	92	73	46	R		✓		✓	✓	2	230	12	3.47	25	1	38
	Breville LAD308WHT	499	0.08	3.25	67	62	28	94	73	51	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	192	14	3.66	20	2	30
	Breville Smart Dry 2 in 1 Viral Protect LAD708	599	0.1	3.96	67	65	24	91	76	54	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	244	14	7.09	25	2	60
	Olimpia Splendid Aquaria S1 24 P	799	0.11	4.08	67	68	26	91	68	42	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	263	15	5.03	24	3	4
	Philips DE5205	999	0.09	3.61	67	64	23	93	77	50	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	218	14	3.69	25	5	104
	Ausclimate WDH-610HE	300	0.07	3.56	63	44	34	93	77	42	R		✓	✓	✓		1	150	10	2.09	12	1	20
	Dimplex GDDE25E	400	0.12	5.39	62	57	21	86	73	57	R	✓	✓		✓	✓	2	289	14	3.11	25	3	30
	Ionmax ION622	299	0.05	3.67	60	38	29	92	78	50	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	133	10	1.76	12	1	50
	Olimpia Splendid Aquaria S1 16P	499	0.04	3.11	58	37	21	94	72	48	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	110	11	1.96	16	3	ns
	Beurer LE30	389	0.07	5.86	56	31	28	84	81	48	R		✓	ns			1	170	8	1.79	10	1	30
	Kogan 2 in 1 Dehumidifier and Air Purifier KAS2IN1DAFA	199	0.06	4.78	56	32	25	88	73	50	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	147	9	2.57	12	2	ns
	Ausclimate NWT WDH-716DE	400	0.11	6.79	55	43	19	80	70	51	R		✓		✓	✓	2	274	13	3.34	20	2	30
	Kogan KADEHUM6LFA	200	0.04	4.87	55	24	36	88	71	41	R	✓	✓	✓		✓	1	109	8	2.18	6	1	10
	Breville LAD208WHT	399	0.05	5.47	54	28	26	85	74	42	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	146	9	2.66	10	2	50
	Kogan KAWFSMDEHUA	259	0.28	18.79	48	40	52	34	78	52	D	✓	✓	✓	✓		1	709	6	2.25	7	3	40

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend models with a CHOICE Expert Rating of 70% or more. **Price Recommended** or typical retail price, as of May 2025. **Running cost and Power cost to remove 10L of water** are based on an electricity cost of 40c/kWh. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of water removal (30%), water removal claims (20%), energy efficiency (30%) and ease of use (20%). **Water removal claims score** Each dehumidifier has a claim as to how much water it can extract in a 24-hour period. We work out how well they meet this claim at three different ambient conditions (room temperature and relative humidity). **Noise** For comparison, a typical conversation measures about 60dBA, while city traffic is about 80dBA. **Type D** Desiccant, **R** Refrigerant. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. **(A)** Metres cubed. All models are made in China except the Mitsubishi (Japan). All have two-year warranties except Beurer and Olimpia Splendid (3 years) and Kogan (1 year). ■



Budget beats

Looking to listen to music without breaking the bank? **Peter Zaluzny** shares the best standard and noise-cancelling headphones for \$250 or less

When it comes to headphones, you tend to get what you pay for, up to a point. Factors like sound quality, ease of use and battery life typically reflect the cost of the product when you're looking at entry-level and mid-range models.

But that doesn't mean good quality audio is reserved for consumers with deep pockets. There are plenty of affordable options that earned very good results in our tests, and you can even score a good deal on mid-range and high-end headphones with a little research. You don't need to break the bank when shopping for a pair of standard or noise-cancelling headphones.

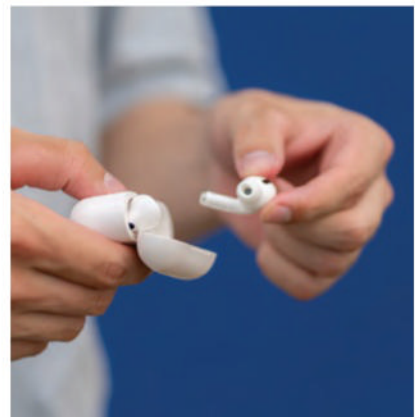
Why buy expensive headphones?

Expensive headphones don't always deliver the high performance results you'd expect in our expert tests. In fact, most of the top-rated models in our review are priced in the mid-range, alongside plenty of more expensive options.

Most of the top-rated models in our review are priced in the mid-range

The key differentiator between headphones is sound quality, and that's a subjective preference. Each manufacturer brings different sound profiles to the table – the way they fine-tune the headphones means your favourite song may sound slightly different across various brands. So, if a \$1000 pair sounds better to your ears, then that's the pair for you (if you're happy to spend that much).

So what sets expensive headphones apart? They tend to have more bells and whistles than you'd find in cheaper models. For example, you may be more likely to get active noise-cancellation (ANC), which isn't as common in cheaper models. Build quality and feel of the materials may also be better for expensive models.



PASSIVE VS ACTIVE NOISE-CANCELLING

There are two types of noise-cancelling headphones: passive and active.

- **Passive noise-cancellation** blocks noise from getting in by forming a snug fit in or around your ear and doesn't require battery power.
- **Active noise-cancellation (ANC)** captures noise from your surroundings using built-in microphones, then cancels it out on the fly. The results are usually much better than passive models, but the hardware and software need power to operate, which drains the battery faster.

Models without ANC are typically called 'standard headphones'. Most standard headphones have some degree of passive noise-cancellation, but some are specifically designed to enhance this effect, with inclusions such as different-sized silicon tips to attach to your earbuds.

How to get a good deal

Our round-up of the best headphones for \$250 or less is based on the manufacturer's recommended retail price (RRP), but it's not too hard to get a good deal on some higher quality headphones. Sales occur pretty regularly across almost all retailers. Some, such as JB Hi-Fi or Harvey Norman, may even be open to haggling.

Also, older models often receive heavy discounts when new ones are released. Turnover can be as frequent as every 12–18 months, and sound quality is often more or less unchanged. New models tend to have better battery life, which is usually the only big difference. Check our test results to see if an older, cheaper pair still provides enough charge for your needs. ▶



An equaliser essentially lets you adjust the volume of various audio frequencies to suit your ears

How to improve sound quality with apps

Almost all Bluetooth headphones have an associated app for smartphones and tablets. These are used to adjust a range of settings and usually include an equaliser (EQ) of some kind. This essentially lets you adjust the volume of various audio frequencies to suit your ears.

You may want to increase the mid-levels, for example, which can help amplify vocals. Or maybe the bass is too heavy and you want to pull it down a touch. Most apps have a range of pre-sets suited to various genres and one or two free slots to set your own EQ.

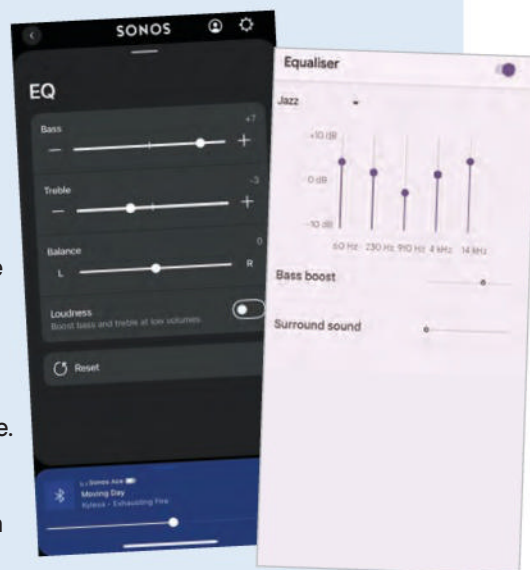
We test headphones on the default EQ out of the box in order to maintain a level playing field. But it's worth installing the official app and playing with the EQ, as your headphones will more than likely sound better if you tweak the settings to your liking. You can find all of the information in the instruction manual.

Don't expect miracles, of course. This won't turn a poor performing pair of headphones around, but it can help you fine-tune things with just a little bit of work.

While manufacturers' apps are mostly available in the iOS App Store or Android Play Store, some

brands bake these settings into their operating systems and devices. This occurs when, say, a smartphone manufacturer also makes headphones.

For example, when you connect a pair of Google Pixel Buds to a Pixel smartphone, the equaliser and other options are in the Bluetooth settings of the phone rather than in a separate app. Apple does something similar when you connect AirPods to an iOS device.



Adjustable and pre-set equalisers can help you tweak sound quality to suit your listening preferences.

Best cheap headphones

When people talk about finding the best headphones, they usually mean the headphones with the best sound quality. This is the most important part of our test, but we also look at other aspects, including comfort, battery life and durability.

Featured here are the best headphones that cost \$250 or less, based on our CHOICE Expert Rating, which factors in various performance tests. Some models with a lower sound quality score may have scored higher for other reasons; for example, they may have performed better in the battery life or durability tests.

Bear in mind, we only recommend headphones with a CHOICE Expert Rating of 75% or more. That said, cheaper headphones that scored 70–74% are still worth considering, especially if their sound quality results are 70% or higher.

So, when you're looking through this selection of our cheaper picks, make sure you check the other test scores they received in the tables on pages 62–63, rather than just focusing on the CHOICE Expert Rating. That way you can find a pair of headphones that truly suits your needs.



NOISE-CANCELLING



74%

Samsung Galaxy Buds FE

Type: In-ear, true wireless

As far as we can tell from our tests, you're not going to get better sound quality in a pair of earbuds that cost less than \$200. That said, the battery life could be better, as plenty of similar in-ear, true wireless buds deliver seven hours or more, compared to the 6.5 hours offered here. The app is also optimised for Android and, given that these are a first-party product, there are no guarantees that non-Samsung users will have access to the same features and functions, which includes other Android devices.



72%

JBL Live Buds 3

Type: In-ear, true wireless

These earbuds are a great option if you can grab them during a sale. The only real letdown is the ANC performance in default mode, but you can adjust ANC settings in the JBL Headphones app, which may improve things. They're also worth considering if you're the kind of person who always forgets to charge things. It takes just 15 minutes for these buds to reach almost 50% charge (4hr 12min) from a depleted battery. But even then, the case can hold three additional charges, giving you over 35 hours of total listening time.



73%

JBL Live 770NC

Type: Over-ear, wireless

These cans score similarly to the 660NC headphones (on page 61), with both earning good results in many areas of our assessment. But there are a few key differences that will determine which pair you want to purchase. The main difference is battery life, with the 770NCs delivering an extra 18 hours of listening time on a single charge. They also have much better active noise cancellation, although they're not quite as comfortable or durable as the 660NCs.



73%

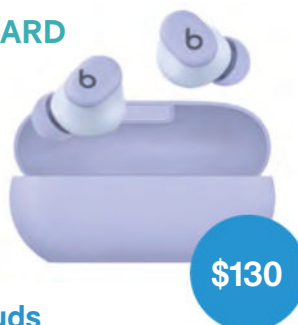
JBL Tune 770NC

Type: Over-ear, wireless

These headphones look very similar to the JBL Live 770NCs and cost less, but there are a few key differences. They have better sound quality, are more durable, and are much easier to clean. Plus, they use buttons instead of touch controls, which could reduce the risk of accidentally pausing or skipping a song. However, they're slightly less comfortable and active noise cancellation is noticeably less effective. Battery life, while still substantial at over 48 hours, is shorter than the JBL Live headphones.

**72%****Soundcore Liberty 4 NC****Type:** In-ear, true wireless

These are among the cheapest noise-cancelling earbuds to earn an expert rating of 70% or more. The battery, in particular, is worth noting – not only does it last almost 9.5 hours, the case comes with four additional charges. They also have excellent durability, good comfort and impressive active noise-cancellation. You don't get digital assistant support and the microphone isn't very impressive, but these feel like suitable compromises for the price.

\$165**STANDARD****74%****Beats Solo Buds****Type:** In-ear, true wireless

Need long battery life? Beats has you covered. Nearly 18.5 hours of battery off the back of a single charge is almost unheard of in the world of earbuds – provided you can live without active noise-cancellation. While sound quality isn't the best in this category, audio is still good. The Beats mobile app includes some basic equaliser adjustments so you can likely improve sound quality to suit your ears. But the case doesn't have a built-in battery and can't recharge on the go.

\$130**72%****Skullcandy Push Play Active****Type:** In-ear, true wireless

These are about the best pair of earbuds you're can get for \$100. Sound quality, comfort and durability are good and battery life is longer than most other headphones in this price range, with two additional charges in the case. They even have some water and dust resistance (IP55). Ease of use and microphone quality are only OK, but these may be acceptable compromises when you consider the low price and very good battery life. There's also an app for iOS and Android that includes an equaliser.

\$100**72%****JBL Live 660NC****Type:** Over-ear, wireless

These headphones are consistently good across most aspects of our test, including sound quality. Active noise-cancellation and microphone quality are only OK, however. They did earn an excellent rating in our durability test, so these headphones should last a while as long as you take care of them. The only other key differences compared to the 770NC headphones (which also cost \$250) are a shorter battery life, slightly better comfort and much worse active noise-cancellation results.

\$250**72%****JBL Tune 720BT****Type:** Over-ear, wireless

These headphones didn't score high enough to be recommended, but we still think they're a good option if you're on a budget. They have decent enough sound quality, OK durability and close to 95 hours of battery life. This may justify the otherwise middling test results such as comfort (57%), and microphone quality (49%), especially if you're prone to misplacing things and don't want to invest in anything too flashy. And you can often find them on sale for under \$100.

\$130**70%****Sennheiser Sport True Wireless****Type:** In-ear, true wireless

These are a pair of all-round good performers, save for the microphone quality, which is borderline at best. Battery life isn't bad in the broader context of true wireless earbuds, and the case comes with two additional charges, which is handy. They're also splash-resistant and dustproof (IP54) and include six cushions for your ear canal so you can find the ideal fit. ▶

\$200

IN-EAR HEADPHONES		TYPE			PERFORMANCE												SPECIFICATIONS															
Recommended		Connectivity	Active noise cancellation	Price (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)		Sound quality score (%)		Active noise cancellation score (%)		Comfort score (%)		Battery life score (%)		Ease of use score (%)		Durability score (%)		Microphone score (%)		Cleaning score (%)		Battery life (hh:mm)*		Battery life after 15 min charge*		IP rating (claimed)	Usable when battery dies**	Carry bag included	Detachable cable	USB-C charging	Weight (g)
✓	Apple AirPods Pro (2nd generation)	True wireless	✓	399	75	81	87	80	60	56	83	59	90	6:47	2:20	IPX4																11
✓	Bose QuietComfort Ultra Earbuds	True wireless	✓	450	75	79	88	73	62	60	89	49	75	6:32	2:22	IPX4													✓			14
✓	Bose QuietComfort Earbuds (2nd gen)	True wireless	✓	290	75	80	70	76	69	63	90	51	95	8:51	2:45	IPX4													✓			12
✓	JBL Tour Pro 3	True wireless	✓	400	75	78	76	74	74	66	82	67	80	8:37	3:50	IP55				✓								✓	✓			11
	Beats Solo Buds	True wireless		130	74	70	na	81	100	53	93	53	95	18:24	4:06	ns													✓			11
	Bose QuietComfort Earbuds II	True wireless	✓	430	74	77	85	74	63	60	89	59	80	7:29	2:37	IPX4													✓			14
	Samsung Galaxy Buds FE	True wireless	✓	199	74	82	73	85	57	61	76	64	100	6:29	1:57	ns													✓			12
	Technics EAH-AZ80	True wireless	✓	449	73	81	71	79	51	64	96	56	95	7:12	1:15	IPX4													✓			12
	Beats Studio Buds+	True wireless	✓	270	72	77	63	78	72	54	89	54	90	8:15	4:04	IPX4													✓			11
	JBL Live Buds 3	True wireless	✓	250	72	76	58	74	73	68	81	77	100	8:31	4:12	IP55													✓			10
	Sennheiser IE 600	Wired		1200	72	81	na	61	na	42	85	na	60	na	na	ns	✓	✓	✓													29
	Sennheiser Momentum True Wireless 4	True wireless	✓	500	72	76	78	71	61	69	66	60	90	7:27	1:36	IP54													✓			12
	Skullcandy Push Play Active	True wireless		100	72	72	na	72	82	57	78	52	55	11:20	5:29	IP55													✓			15
	Sony WF-1000XM5	True wireless	✓	399	72	82	61	77	60	61	81	64	100	8:17	2:39	IPX4													✓			12
	Soundcore Liberty 4 NC	True wireless	✓	165	72	71	70	73	81	59	91	48	60	9:23	5:17	IPX4													✓			11
	Bose Ultra Open Earbuds	True wireless		449	71	71	na	67	77	59	92	51	80	8:58	3:24	IPX4													✓			13
	JBL Soundgear Sense	True wireless		199	71	76	na	75	63	60	86	60	80	7:20	4:14	IP54													✓			26
	Skullcandy Rail ANC	True wireless		150	71	71	74	78	68	61	81	58	60	8:17	3:20	IP55													✓			12
	Technics EAH-AZ40M2	True wireless		249	71	79	67	81	43	65	87	65	95	5:42	1:19	IPX4													✓			9
	Yamaha TW-E3C	True wireless		129	71	74	na	66	62	64	96	82	90	8:27	1:51	IPX5													✓			11
	Sennheiser Sport True Wireless	True wireless		200	70	74	na	75	51	66	93	50	95	7:15	1:46	IP54													✓			13

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend products with a CHOICE Expert Rating of 75% or above. **Price** Recommended retail or typical retail price as of May 2025. **CHOICE Expert Rating** Made up of sound quality (45%), active noise cancellation score (15%), ease of use (17.5%), battery (10%), comfort (7.5%) and durability (5%). These are new weightings as of April 2025, which is why scores for previously tested models may have changed. Our test method remains unchanged. Some headphones don't have active noise cancellation (ANC) and/or built-in batteries. In these cases, **active noise cancellation** and **battery life scores** are listed as na and the weighted contribution to the expert rating is evenly distributed across the remaining scores. **Microphone quality** and **cleaning scores** are listed in our table but don't contribute to the CHOICE Expert Rating. **IP rating** An ingress protection (IP) rating is the best way to identify whether the headphones are dust and water resistant. The first digit applies to particulate protection (dirt, dust etc.) and the second refers to moisture protection. Generally speaking, higher numbers equal a greater level of protection. If there is an X, it means this model does not offer that kind of protection. *ANC headphones are measured with ANC active and set to maximum reduction. ** Some headphones with physical connectivity via an audio cable will continue to function without a charge if you can plug them in to a 3.5mm port, but will lose all functions except audio playback (e.g. ANC equalisation, onboard controls etc.). **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated.

Shop Ethical rating

BRAND	RATING
Apple	C
Beats	C
Bose	D
Bowers & Wilkins	D
JBL	F
Samsung	F
Sennheiser	B
Skullcandy	C
Sonos	C
Sony	C

NOTE: Other brands in our review not mentioned here don't have a Shop Ethical rating. For more on Shop Ethical ratings and what they mean, see p73.



ON/OVER-EAR HEADPHONES			TYPE		PERFORMANCE											SPECIFICATIONS																
Recommended		Connectivity	Active noise cancellation	Price (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)		Sound quality score (%)		Active noise cancellation score (%)		Comfort score (%)		Battery life score (%)		Ease of use score (%)		Durability score (%)		Microphone score (%)		Cleaning score (%)		Battery life (hh:mm)*		Battery life after 15 min charge*		IP rating (claimed)	Usable when battery dies**	Carry bag included	Detachable cable	USB-C charging	Weight (g)
✓	Bowers & Wilkins PX8	Wireless	✓	1149	77	78	73	67	84	69	97	76	90	40:02	9:27	ns		✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	316
✓	Sennheiser Momentum 4 Wireless	Wireless	✓	580	77	71	78	68	98	69	96	53	70	51:15	9:19	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	292
✓	Bose QuietComfort Headphones	Wireless	✓	550	76	80	85	73	58	70	88	78	95	26:36	4:15	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	234
	Audio-Technica ATH-M50xBT2	Wireless		379	74	70	na	53	96	66	89	74	75	65:04	6:43	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	306
	Austrian Audio Hi-X25BT	Wireless		269	74	68	na	66	98	68	84	62	90	60:05	10:56	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	272
	Bose QuietComfort Ultra Headphones	Wireless	✓	649	74	79	86	71	54	63	97	79	95	26:32	3:18	ns			✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	254
	Bowers & Wilkins Px7 S2e	Wireless	✓	599	74	77	71	66	77	66	96	80	na	34:59	9:28	ns			✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	306
	Sennheiser Accentum Plus Wireless	Wireless	✓	400	74	70	75	72	95	58	93	56	75	49:01	7:32	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	225
	Audio-Technica ATH-WP900	Wired		1099	73	87	na	70	na	40	42	na	90	na	na	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓								✓	✓	✓		266
	Beats Solo 4	Wireless		330	73	71	na	61	98	56	75	65	70	80:02	9:50	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	216
	Beats Studio Pro	Wireless	✓	530	73	76	81	64	71	59	74	44	50	32:29	5:24	ns			✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	269
	JBL Live 770NC	Wireless	✓	250	73	69	76	66	98	68	49	64	60	57:31	8:44	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	253
	JBL Tune 770NC	Wireless	✓	200	73	73	63	63	96	64	67	60	85	48:25	11:07	ns	✓			✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	228
	JBL Live 660NC	Wireless	✓	250	72	70	59	70	87	67	93	64	70	41:48	8:40	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	262
	JBL Tune 720BT	Wireless		130	72	68	na	57	98	62	69	49	90	94:34	17:10	ns	✓			✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	222
	Sonos Ace	Wireless	✓	699	72	74	76	62	71	63	88	61	90	30:51	7:43	ns			✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	315
	Sony WH-1000XM5	Wireless	✓	479	72	75	80	62	68	61	82	66	100	29:43	8:27	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	249
	JBL Live 460NC	Wireless		199	71	66	69	66	92	69	81	62	65	45:17	9:02	ns	✓			✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	213
	JLab Jbuds Lux ANC	Wireless		180	71	68	60	65	95	65	82	62	45	47:54	6:13	ns													✓			236
	KEF Mu 7	Wireless		535	71	71	58	66	97	70	42	62	45	69:60	13:40	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	308
	Sennheiser Accentum Wireless	Wireless		300	71	66	72	73	84	61	87	66	75	41:02	7:24	ns													✓			221
	Shure Aonic 40	Wireless		429	71	73	68	70	76	61	75	61	90	35:00	6:54	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	311





Blown away

Looking to clear those piles of winter leaves? **Denis Gallagher** explains how we find the models that leave the competition behind

If you (or your neighbours) have deciduous trees, your yard, driveway and outdoor spaces are probably becoming steadily covered in a thick blanket of leaves around this time of year. While all those golden leaves look pretty for a while, they soon become a pile of decomposing plant matter cluttering up your property.

If you're looking to clear the leaf clutter from your life, you may be considering buying a leaf blower or a blower vac with a built-in vacuum that mulches the leaves for you. But how do you know which model will do the best job?

That's what our reviews are for – and here's how we get our results.

Step 1: Choosing which models to test

Leaf blowers come in electric, petrol and battery-powered cordless varieties. Some also have a vacuum

function. Petrol models are still available, but most models now being released are battery-powered – increases in battery capacity and power allow these devices to perform stronger for longer.

Our product researcher surveys manufacturers to find out what the latest models are along with their specifications. We try to include a range of brands and models found in both mainstream shops and specialist hardware stores.

Once a list featuring a range of brands and price points is chosen, our buyers then go through the process of purchasing the leaf blowers and blower vacs as a regular consumer would, to ensure we're not getting special treatment.

Step 2: Putting them to the test

When testing performance and ease of use, our expert tester James Thomson uses the leaf blowers in a real-life situation to see how they compare when it comes to

clearing leaves and twigs from lawns and, in the case of blower vacs, vacuuming up the pile.

PERFORMANCE

For the blowing test, we spread a set amount of dry leaves and twigs onto a marked-out grassed area to replicate a home lawn environment. Our tester times how long it takes for each blower to blow all the leaves out of the marked area. He penalises the battery-powered models that run out of power before completing the job.

Our expert tester uses the leaf blowers in a real-life situation to see how they compare



LEAF BLOWERS TEST

To test the performance of the blower vacs with a vacuuming function, Thomson times how long it takes to convert from blower to vacuum mode and suck up a 1kg pile of leaves and twigs. He then repeats the test with a 2kg pile of leaves.

The best scoring models can blow or vacuum the area fastest and leave the fewest leaves and twigs behind.

Thomson also measures the noise produced by each blower, and we publish the highest noise level in our review.

EASE OF USE

Our tester looks at how easy it is to manoeuvre the leaf blower, taking into account the absence or presence of a power cord and the weight of the blower. He also assesses what it's like to use the leaf blower, including how easily the machine becomes blocked, the intensity of vibrations, trigger comfort and ease of switching between modes for blower vacs.

Step 3: Calculating the scores

The CHOICE Expert Rating, our overall score that determines which products we recommend, is made up of blowing performance (65%) and ease of use (35%).

As not all models have a vacuum, the vacuum scores for blower vacs are not included in the CHOICE Expert Rating but are shown for comparison with other blower vac models.

Features to look for in a leaf blower

WEIGHT AND BALANCE

Your blower should be well-balanced and not too heavy (a vacuum model will get heavier as the bag fills up).

COLLECTION BAG

For vacuum models, ideally you want a collection bag that's easily removed and emptied, and not too large. The bigger it is, the heavier it'll be when full.

SWITCHING MODES

It should be easy to convert the machine from blower to vacuum

mode (if it has one) – preferably without needing tools. Some models need you to swap the nozzle and attach the bag when converting from blower to vacuum, while others have all the features built-in (making them more bulky) and just need you to flick a lever or switch.

MULCHING RATIO

Many models with a mulching function claim a mulching ratio of around 10:1 – that is, 10 bags of leaves reduced to one bag of mulch. However, past testing has shown the actual ratio to be more like 4:1.

If you need something with a bit more grunt, check out our guide to garden shredders below.

VARIABLE SPEED

This lets you use just enough power to keep the leaves moving without blasting them away.

EASY TO USE

Look for easy access to the fan area to clear blockages, a trigger lock or similar that lets you operate the blower without holding down the trigger the whole time, and comfortable handles. ▶

Do you need a garden shredder?

If you've got lots of garden waste you want to mulch, a blower vac isn't your only option. In some cases, it might make more sense to buy a good-quality leaf blower and a separate garden shredder instead. While this will likely cost you more (and take up more space in your shed), it can be a better option if you've got a large yard with lots of gardening debris including sticks, plant cuttings and wet plant matter that you want to dispose of.

If you're in the market for a garden shredder, here are some key features to look for.

EASE OF USE

When shopping for a shredder, if you can, test how easy it is to manoeuvre and lift. A heavy or clunky model may be hard to use in rough terrain or over distance. Also check how easy it is to access the blades for adjustment.

PLUNGER

This is basically a small paddle with a handle used to push the material into the shredder. It's usually long enough to be useful at pushing material into the blades, but too short to actually contact the blades. A plunger helps to avoid a nasty injury to your fingers. If your shredder doesn't come with one,

you can also use a sturdy stick, though be cautious of getting it caught by the blades or rollers and being wrenched from your hand.

COLLECTION BAG

If your machine doesn't come with a collection bag or bin, a sturdy garbage bag will often work just as well.

REVERSE FUNCTION

This is a switch that reverses the direction of the blades or rollers to help clear any jammed material. Some models have an automatic reverse that engages when the machine detects a blockage. For safety (both yours and the shredder's), follow manufacturer instructions carefully when using this function.

BRANCH THICKNESS

When investigating different shredder models, consider the maximum branch thickness you're likely to be shredding, and make sure the shredder can handle that size. The corded electric cordless shredders we've tested can all handle branches up to 35mm thick (and some can even handle more than this).



Recommended		TYPE		PERFORMANCE							SPECIFICATIONS							
		Power source	Vacuum function	Price (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Blower performance score (%)	Blower ease of use score (%)	Vacuum performance score (%)	Vacuum ease of use score (%)	Noise at user's position and at 7.5m (dBA)	Battery – Li-ion (V)	Battery capacity (Ah)	Measured minimum battery life / charge time (min)	Blow speed, claimed (km/h)	Detachable tube	Dimensions (cm, L x W x D)	Weight (kg)	Warranty – blower / battery & charger (yr)
✓	Makita 40V Max Brushless Blower Kit UB001GM101	B		689	87	87	85	na	na	83 / 72	36	4	6 / 45	230	✓	92–120 x 17 x 30	3.5	3 / 2 (B)
✓	DeWalt 54V XR FlexVolt Axial Blower	B		499	87	90	83	na	na	105 / 88	18/54	3	13 / 75	200	✓	93 x 18 x 28	4.3	3 / 3
✓	Greenworks 60V Pro Axial Blower 4Ah Kit	B		449	87	91	80	na	na	92 / 75	54	4	15 / 40	270	✓	103 x 16 x 28	4.5	4 / 2
✓	Ego Power+ 110S M3/H Blower	B		719	86	89	80	na	na	90 / 72	56	5	14 / 40	257	✓	104 x 17 x 25	4.6	5 / 3
✓	Makita DUB362PT2	B		567	85	86	83	na	na	90 / 83	2 x 18	5	12 / 45	193	✓	98 x 20 x 29	4.1	2 / 2
✓	AEG 18V Fusion Stealth Jet Blower 8Ah Kit A18FBLW28	B		499	84	85	83	na	na	84 / 73	18	5	15 / 150	230	✓	94 x 19 x 35	3.4	3 / 1 (B)
✓	Hikoki 36V Brushless Blower	B		549	84	85	82	na	na	86 / 72	36/18	2.5	11 / 32	190	✓	94 x 25 x 26	3.6	3 / 3 (B)
✓	Worx Nitro 40V Brushless Leafjet Blower Kit	B		479	84	86	80	na	na	93 / 76	2 x 20	5	14 / 150	266		98 x 16 x 17	2.7	2 / 2 (B)
✓	Bosch Professional Cordless Leaf Blower + 18V 5.0Ah Starter Kit GBL 18V-750	B		379	83	84	80	na	na	87 / 72	18	5	11 / 70	198	✓	99 x 20 x 30	3.4	2 (B)
✓	Kress 60V Professional Blower Kit KG560E.9	B		787	83	85	78	na	na	89 / 72	54	4	18 / 50	215		93 x 20 x 25	5	5 / 2
✓	Husqvarna 120iBV With Battery and Charger	B	✓	549	81	78	85	68	67	90 / 74	36	4	13 / ns	173	✓	97 x 22 x 35	4.5	5 / (C)
	Husqvarna 536LiB	B		997	80	83	73	na	na	96 / 89	36	5.2	16 / ns	173	✓	90 x 13 x 27	4	2 / 2
	Milwaukee M18 Fuel Blower Kit M18FBL802	B		748	79	76	85	na	na	89 / 76	18	8	16 / 83	193		94 x 15 x 26	3.2	5 / 2
	DeWalt DCM572X1-XE	B		499	79	78	80	na	na	91 / 85	54	3	17 / 85	207	✓	96 x 23 x 40	4.5	3 / 3
	Stanley FatMax V20 18V Brushless Blower 4.0Ah Kit SFMCBL730M1-XE	B		269	77	75	80	na	na	91 / 75	18	4	8 / 120	177	✓	84 x 16 x 32	2.9	1 / 1 (B)
	Ryobi 18V ONE+ HP™ Brushless Garden Blower 5.0Ah Kit R18XBLW35	B		299	76	72	83	na	na	93 / 72	18	5	12 / 150	315 (A)	✓	96 x 21 x 26	2.6	4 / 3 (B)
	Honda HHB25	P4		499	76	81	68	na	na	94 / 77	na	na	na	230	✓	96 x 27 x 37	5.2	4
	Ego LB5302E	B		455	76	76	77	na	na	88 / 83	56	2.5	20 / 50	176	✓	92 x 16 x 26	3.5	5 / 3
	Metabo LB 18 LTX BL	B		299	76	71	85	na	na	84 / 74	18	5.2	19 / ns	150	✓	94 x 16 x 28	2.9	3 / 3 (B)
	Morrison Petrol Blower Vac Ezi Switch BLV30	P2	✓	293	74	79	65	83	83	95 / 79	na	na	na	252		125 x 24 x 55	7.2	4
	Ozito BLV-2401	E	✓	59	74	74	73	68	77	95 / 92	na	na	na	270		121 x 35 x 18	3.4	3 / na
	Ozito PXC 18V Brushless Jet Blower Kit PXJBK-418	B		199	73	71	77	na	na	95 / 80	18	4	9 / 75	200	✓	90 x 16 x 29	2.8	5 / 3
	Rockwell 18V 4Ah Cordless Blower Kit RG8517	B		149	72	63	87	na	na	84 / 65	18	4	17 / 120	120	✓	94 x 19 x 25	2.5	3 / 1 (B)
	Lincoln 3000W Blower Vacuum Variable Speed LBV01E	E	✓	65	71	67	78	73	80	84 / 71	na	na	na	270		118 x 16 x 32	2.8	ns
	Ryobi 18V ONE+ HP Brushless 350CFM Jet Blower 4.0Ah Kit	B		269	70	68	73	na	na	88 / 71	18	4	14 / ns	177	✓	80 x 18 x 33	3.2	4 / 2
	Bosch GBL 18V-120 Professional	B		249	69	60	87	na	na	85 / 75	18	5	18 / 70	270	✓	75 x 15 x 20	1.8	2 / 2
	DeWalt 18V XR Blower	B		459	69	59	87	na	na	88 / 72	18	5	21 / 75	290	✓	77 x 13 x 20	2	3 / 3

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend models with a CHOICE Expert Rating greater than 80%. **Type B** Battery, **E** Electric (corded), **P4** Petrol 4-stroke, **P2** Petrol 2-stroke. **Price** Recommended or typical retail, as of May 2025. **(A)** With nozzle, 270km/h without. **(B)** Warranty period can be extended with registration, check the product for more information. **(C)** 3 years for battery, 1 year for charger. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. The Makita UB001GM101 and Ego Power+ 110S M3/H have a carry strap; the Morrison BLV30, Ozito BLV-2401 and Lincoln LBV01E have a nose wheel; and the Husqvarna 120iBV has both a carry strap and nose wheel. ■



From petrol to pedals

Wondering if an e-bike can replace your car? **Alice Richard** explains what you need to consider before swapping four wheels for two

Owning a car gives you plenty of freedom, but it can also put a dampener on your budget. Insurance, servicing and rego payments seem to roll around before you know it, and often at inopportune times. (Why do they always arrive exactly when you have a big vet bill or unexpected medical expense?)

It's not just about the money though: cars can cramp your style in other ways. There's the hassle of finding parking,

sitting in peak hour traffic and, for some people, concerns about the environmental impact of their car.

An electric bike can free you from these woes: you can sail straight past banked-up traffic, parking is a cinch, running costs are significantly cheaper, and your carbon footprint will be much smaller.

Whether you're e-bike curious or already a dedicated e-cycler, you might be wondering if you could ditch your car completely and just stick to your electric treadly.

Parking is a cinch, running costs are cheaper, and your carbon footprint much smaller

From personal experience, yes. I sold my car and bought a long-tail cargo e-bike back in 2018, and I can tell you that it is definitely possible – but it's admittedly not for everyone.

It works for my lifestyle: I work from home, the supermarket is close by, I'm a confident rider, and I hate the gym so it's a great way for me to get some exercise.

I'm lucky to live in an area with plenty of public transport and car-sharing services within a block or two for those days I can't ride, and my child is still small enough that I can easily make it up hills with her on the back. But some things are changing, and lately I've ►

been wondering whether I should buy a car again.

My daughter now goes to school a few suburbs away so I have to hire a car-share several times a week, which is adding up in fees. She's nearly 10 and growing like a weed so it won't be long until those hills start feeling like mountains. Plus, we're planning some camping and road trips this year, so we'll need a car for those.

Is my car-free existence sustainable? Maybe, but there's a lot to consider.

If you're thinking of breaking up with your car and hitting the road with an e-bike instead, here are the positives and negatives that I've experienced over the years.

Plus, we share some helpful tips on the types of lifestyles that may be suited to an automobile-free existence – and the types that aren't.

Lately I've been wondering whether I should buy a car again



The pros and cons of replacing your car with an e-bike



Pros

- The savings are substantial. No more costs for petrol, parking or rego, and cheaper purchase, insurance, repayment and servicing costs. Even if you pay for a car-share subscription or occasional car hire, it usually ends up being far cheaper than owning a car.
- It can be faster to get where you're going – you can avoid congestion by taking bike paths.
- You won't have to worry about finding parking, and you can generally ride right up to your destination instead of having to walk from where you've parked.



Cons

- Exercise and fresh air while you're travelling.
- You'll significantly reduce your carbon footprint.
- You don't need a licence.
- No more stressful car commutes in peak hour.
- The maximum speed limit for e-bikes in Australia is 25km/hour.
- You're at the mercy of weather, which can change mid-ride.
- It can be unsafe riding on the road.
- It's not always glamorous: think helmet hair and arriving places sweaty and out of breath.
- Due to their high value and movability, e-bikes are often targeted by bike thieves – you'll need somewhere safe and secure to store it and lock it up, and potentially have to take out insurance to cover it for theft.
- Riding may be too difficult if you have a physical disability, chronic pain or other health condition.
- If you have children you want to carry on your bike, you may need to invest in a cargo bike and other accessories such as a child seat.
- As your children get bigger, it can get harder to transport them on the bike.
- You generally can't carry large or very heavy items on your bike.
- If you anticipate needing a vehicle occasionally, you may need to pay for car-sharing membership or similar.
- Some cities don't have great cycling infrastructure.
- Flat tyres can be difficult to replace.
- Repairs can be tricky, depending on the brand – consider the availability of replacement parts before you buy and try to find a mechanic you can trust.
- New batteries can be expensive.



Will it work for you?

For some people, an e-bike can easily replace their car for most things – and will probably save a lot of hassle and money. But for others, it's not likely to be a realistic solution. Some lifestyles suit a car-free existence – and some don't.

WHY AN E-BIKE MIGHT WORK INSTEAD OF A CAR:

- You live in an urban area where public transport is easily accessible.
- You don't have to travel far to work, or you work from home.
- The area you live in has good bike lanes and bike paths to travel on.
- You don't have children to transport around, or if you do, they're still small enough that you can carry them on your bike.
- You don't go on road trips very often.
- There are easy-to-access car sharing options near you.
- You either don't need to buy large quantities of groceries, or you can easily have them delivered.

WHY IT MIGHT BE DIFFICULT TO DITCH THE CAR:

- You have a long commute.
- There aren't many public transport or car-share options in your area.
- You live in either a particularly cold and wet or very hot climate.
- You're not a confident cyclist.
- There aren't many bike lanes or paths near you.
- You have physical limitations that can make riding difficult.
- You're buying groceries for a large household or you buy in bulk.
- You regularly go on road trips or long drives in your city.
- Your kids (or pets!) are too big for you to carry them on a bike.

The company I bought my bike from offered a very generous two-week trial



Try before you buy

When we've tested e-bikes in our labs, we've found that they can really vary in terms of how easy and comfortable they are to ride – they're not like riding a regular bike.

There are so many different options for motors, configurations, accessories and, of course, price that you really want to make sure you're choosing exactly the right set-up, especially if you're planning for it to replace your car.

The best way to decide whether a particular e-bike is right for you is to visit a bike shop and take a few different bikes for a ride.

The company I bought my bike from offered a very generous two-week trial, which gave me the opportunity to assess whether I could realistically get rid of my car and just live with the bike. (I didn't use my car once during those two weeks, which was a pretty clear sign!)

And if you're still not sure you're ready to trade in your seatbelt for a helmet, you could try an e-bike subscription service such as Lug+Carrie. These subscriptions often cover bike rental, servicing,

insurance and roadside assistance, so you can trial e-bike life before committing to it full-time.

Can you go car-free?

If your lifestyle and motivations align with a bike-only existence, go for it! Even if you still need to use a car occasionally, you might find having to hire or book a car-share is only a slight inconvenience compared to the savings and improved wellbeing.

It is a big adjustment, though, so it's not a decision to be made lightly. There's also no reason why you can't purchase an e-bike, try it out for a few months while you still own a car, then ditch four wheels in favour of two permanently. ►



Are electric bike batteries safe?

With numerous media reports of exploding electric bike batteries, they might seem like a disaster waiting to happen – but there are ways to manage the risks.

Electric bikes use lithium-ion batteries, which you can also find in plenty of tech products. But electric bike batteries are much larger, so if something goes wrong, the results can be much worse.

A lot of the incidents have occurred because of batteries either being modified or used with the wrong type of charger. All batteries should have battery management systems that control the way a battery is charged and cut off when they have reached maximum charge. Cheap batteries from unregulated markets may lack these systems. This is why you need to stick with reputable brands.

Here are some tips developed during our electric bike tests.

1 CHARGE SAFELY

You should only charge bikes when you're at home and awake. Don't leave them charging overnight or when you're out.

Charge your bike in a well-ventilated, open area with a working smoke alarm, away from items and objects that can catch fire. Avoid charging the bike in a spot that can obstruct exits if the battery ignites.

2 IDENTIFY FAULTY BATTERIES

Lithium-ion batteries degrade over time. If your battery doesn't last as long as it used to and takes longer to charge, consider getting a new one. Degraded batteries can be dangerous.

Also, look, feel or smell for warning signs that can indicate a faulty battery. Electric bike batteries shouldn't run hot or emit smoke or other vapours when in use and while charging. These are signs of overheating, and the battery will need to be replaced.

Check for unusual bumps, lumps, bulges or sections where the case is detaching that could indicate the battery has swollen, which can lead to leaks or, in extreme cases, an explosion.

If you have a faulty battery, remove it safely as per the manual or contact an experienced electric bike mechanic. Store the battery outside in a well-ventilated area, at least three metres from buildings,

objects or pets and anything else that can catch fire, until you can dispose of it safely.

Do not throw the battery in the bin.



Check your local council, or state/territory government website for information on community recycling events as these generally accept large batteries.

3 AVOID THIRD-PARTY BATTERIES AND CHARGERS

Only use the charger that comes with the bike or an alternative that has been approved by the manufacturer. Don't use or purchase electric bikes that don't include a charger and double check to make sure that the included model is approved for use by the manufacturer.

Finally, make sure the charger displays the Australian Regulatory Compliance Marker.



Look for the Australian Regulatory Compliance Marker (circled) on your charger. Do not use a charger if this marker is absent.

Most electric bikes let you easily and safely replace or upgrade the battery. Make sure your replacement battery comes from a reputable supplier approved by the manufacturer. These are often called original equipment manufacturers or OEMs. Avoid third-party batteries as these may not be subject to the same safety requirements.

Only use mechanics that source batteries from approved OEMs. If your bike uses an integrated battery (a battery that isn't easy to detach), don't attempt a home replacement. Take it to a specialist mechanic.

Try to stick with well-known brands such as Bosch, Shimano, and Bafang.

4 USE REPUTABLE MECHANICS

Try to find reputable stores that hire trained mechanics, as they're likely to purchase legitimate bikes and spare parts from manufacturers or approved suppliers. If something seems shady, or it looks like a backyard operation, go elsewhere as you don't know where their spare parts are coming from.



Recommended		Bike type	Price (\$)	PERFORMANCE										SPECIFICATIONS									
				CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Pedal assistance score (%)	Braking score (%)	Turning and low speed score (%)	Comfort score (%)	Handling score (%)	Controls score (%)	On-bike battery score (%)	Off-bike battery score (%)	Display score (%)	Maximum torque (Nm)	Battery size tested (Wh)	Bike sizes available	Lights	Number of gears	Suspension fork	Thumb throttle	Cargo location	Motor location	Weight (kg)
✓	Moustache J.All Cues	HM	9695	80	80	80	85	90	55	78	90	75	85	75	625	3	✓	11	✓		na	M	31
✓	Focus Aventura 6.8 2023	HM	5299	79	80	80	80	90	65	85	90	58	83	85	750	4	✓	11	✓		na	M	27
✓	Orbea Vibe H30	Co	4995	79	70	80	80	80	90	90	90	(A)	59	40	250	4	✓	10			na	R	16
✓	Kalkhoff Endeavour 1.B Move – Step Over	Co	3499	78	80	80	80	80	70	85	53	90	80	65	400	5	✓	8	✓	✓	na	M	24
✓	Reid Classic Ladies Vintage eBike MY24 Sage	Co	1899	78	80	80	60	80	70	88	90	(A)	80	45	374	2		8			na	R	22
✓	Riese & Muller Carrie City	C	9979	78	90	80	70	90	45	83	80	80	80	75	545	1	✓	5	✓		F	M	36
✓	Tern HSD P5i	C	7495	78	80	80	80	80	55	83	80	75	83	75	545	1	✓	5			L	M	33
✓	Vamos El Rapido 2024 Daily Commuter	HR	3295	78	80	80	70	80	60	83	85	85	81	ns	720	1	✓	8	✓	✓	na	R	29
✓	Cube Ella Ride Hybrid 500 Green	Co	4799	77	80	80	80	90	60	88	70	60	80	50	500	2	✓	10	✓		na	M	27
✓	Ordica Neo Mid 27.5	Co	3195	77	80	80	80	80	70	75	85	90	54	ns	504	1	✓	8	✓		na	M	25
✓	Pedal Eagle ST	HM	2999	77	80	80	80	80	70	70	70	80	78	70	417	4	✓	8	✓		na	M	29
✓	Benno Enjoy V1	C	5495	76	70	80	80	80	65	83	60	85	80	75	400	1	✓	10			S	M	25
✓	Cube Longtail Sport Hybrid 725	C	7999	76	85	80	80	80	50	80	80	60	83	85	725	1	✓	10			L	M	34
✓	Moov8 With Torque Sensor and Accessories Bundle	C	4199	76	70	80	80	80	60	88	70	70	85	45	345	1	✓	7			S	R	30
✓	Norco Indie VLT 1	Co	2895	76	70	70	80	70	70	75	90	85	83	60	504	4	✓	9	✓	✓	na	M	25
	Benno Boost EVO4	C	7395	75	80	80	80	80	45	80	80	65	80	85	500	2	✓	10			L	M	30
	NCM T3S Step-Thru Trekking E-Bike	HM	1799	75	70	80	55	70	60	88	85	85	79	55	576	2	✓	7	✓	✓	na	R	27
	Smartmotion Pacer	Co	2999	75	80	80	80	70	50	75	85	75	71	ns	614	2	✓	9		✓	na	R	26
	Tern Quick Haul Long D9	C	5995	75	80	80	80	80	45	88	65	75	80	85	400	1	✓	9			L	M	30
	XDS E Cruz Step Over- Bafang	Co	2499	75	70	80	80	70	70	63	75	85	83	80	417	3		8		✓	na	M	22
	Kristall Y20 Fat Tyre	HMF	1875	74	80	70	65	90	50	70	80	75	85	ns	960	1	✓	7	✓	✓	na	R	36
																							(B)
	Leitner SuperT	HRF	1699	74	70	75	65	80	65	75	80	75	80	43	720	1	✓	6	✓	✓	na	R	25
	Cube Sport Dual Hybrid 1000	C	11999	73	90	70	60	90	45	78	80	60	80	85	1000	1	✓	10	✓		F	M	50
	Merida eBig Nine 300SE	HM	3999	73	70	80	80	65	70	65	75	68	80	60	504	3	✓	9	✓		na	M	22
																							(C)
	Moov8 X Electric Bike 22X	HR	2248	73	80	70	70	70	80	88	65	55	80	45	345	1	✓	7			na	R	21
	Smartmotion E20 Step Thru With Suspension	HRF	2199	73	60	65	65	80	70	80	85	80	78	ns	460	1	✓	7	✓	✓	na	R	23
	Ryder Dulili	C	3500	72	80	70	60	80	50	75	68	75	83	ns	696	1	✓	7		✓	L	R	35
	NCM Moscow Plus	HM	2199	71	80	80	40	70	60	75	75	70	83	55	816	3		24	✓		na	R	26
	Sunmono E-Mono ATLAS	C	3195	71	70	80	50	65	45	83	90	73	80	80	720	1	✓	8	✓	✓	L	R	28
	Leitner Milan Cruiser	HR	1425	70	60	80	60	70	50	75	80	75	80	43	720	1	✓	6	✓	✓	na	R	26
	NCM Prague	HM	1499	69	80	80	40	70	60	78	68	53	78	55	468	1		21	✓	✓	na	R	24

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend e-bikes with a CHOICE Expert Rating above 75%. **Price** Recommended retail, as of May 2025. **Bike type** HM Hybrid mountain, Co Commuter, C Cargo, HR Hybrid road, HMF Hybrid mountain folding, HRF Hybrid road folding. **Cargo location** F Front loading, L Long tail, S Short tail. **Motor location** M Middle hub, R Rear hub. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of pedal assistance score (15%), braking score (15%), turning and low speed score (10%), ride comfort score (10%), handling score (10%), controls score (10%), battery use (on-bike) score (10%), battery use (off-bike) score (10%) and display score (10%). **(A)** These models use non-removable batteries and don't receive a score for the battery use (off-bike) test. This doesn't affect their CHOICE Expert Rating. **(B)** Includes indicators. **(C)** Rear only. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. All models have a rear rack except the Orbea Vibe H30, Cube Sport Dual Hybrid 1000, Merida eBig Nine 300SE and NCM Moscow Plus and Prague. ■

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* Indicates a correction or clarification (see Checkout).

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RATING	KEY
A	Praises, no criticism
B	Some praise, no criticism
C	Praises, some criticism
D	Criticism, some praise
F	Criticisms



CONTACT US

CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW, 2204

Email ausconsumer@choice.com.au

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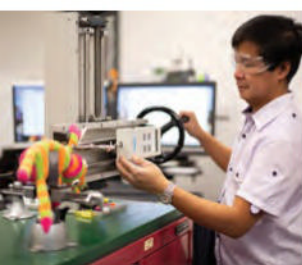
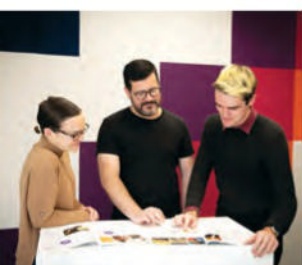
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use a product in their homes. We buy most products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. We've checked the models are available at the time we publish. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias. See choice.com.au/editorialguidelines.

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We put SPF claims to the test –
with surprising results



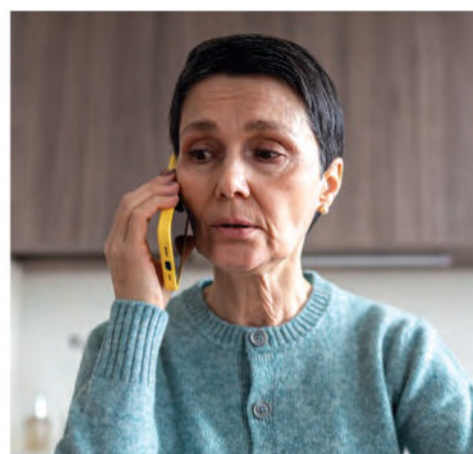
Dutch ovens

Cooking with cast iron:
Spend big, or buy budget?



Speaker now

The best wireless models
for music and podcasts



Low blows

Scams aimed at victims
of natural disasters

Plus

Health insurance, fridges, multi-cookers, heaters & more



PACK IT IN

For difficult-to-open packaging, including its own.



NOT SO CLEARANCE

It's subtract, not add!



WHAT A MELON

"Mum, why is my watermelon smoothie orange?"



U.S. OF EH?

Well, we weren't expecting Klingon.



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Our long-serving rogues' gallery of dodgy ads, toe-curling typos and misadventures in marketing, as sent in by you – our tickled, angered and bewildered readers. And thanks to the timeless shonkiness of so much advertising, you're always spoilt for choice – so keep 'em coming. Email high-quality unedited photos to hardword@choice.com.au.

This month, thanks go to Simon Dowse (U.S. of eh?), Jim Erskine (What a melon), Vince Haines (Pack it in) and Denise Turner (Not so clearance).

Compiled by Daniel Wynne